

THE BRAHMIN'S TREASURE



G. A. HENTY

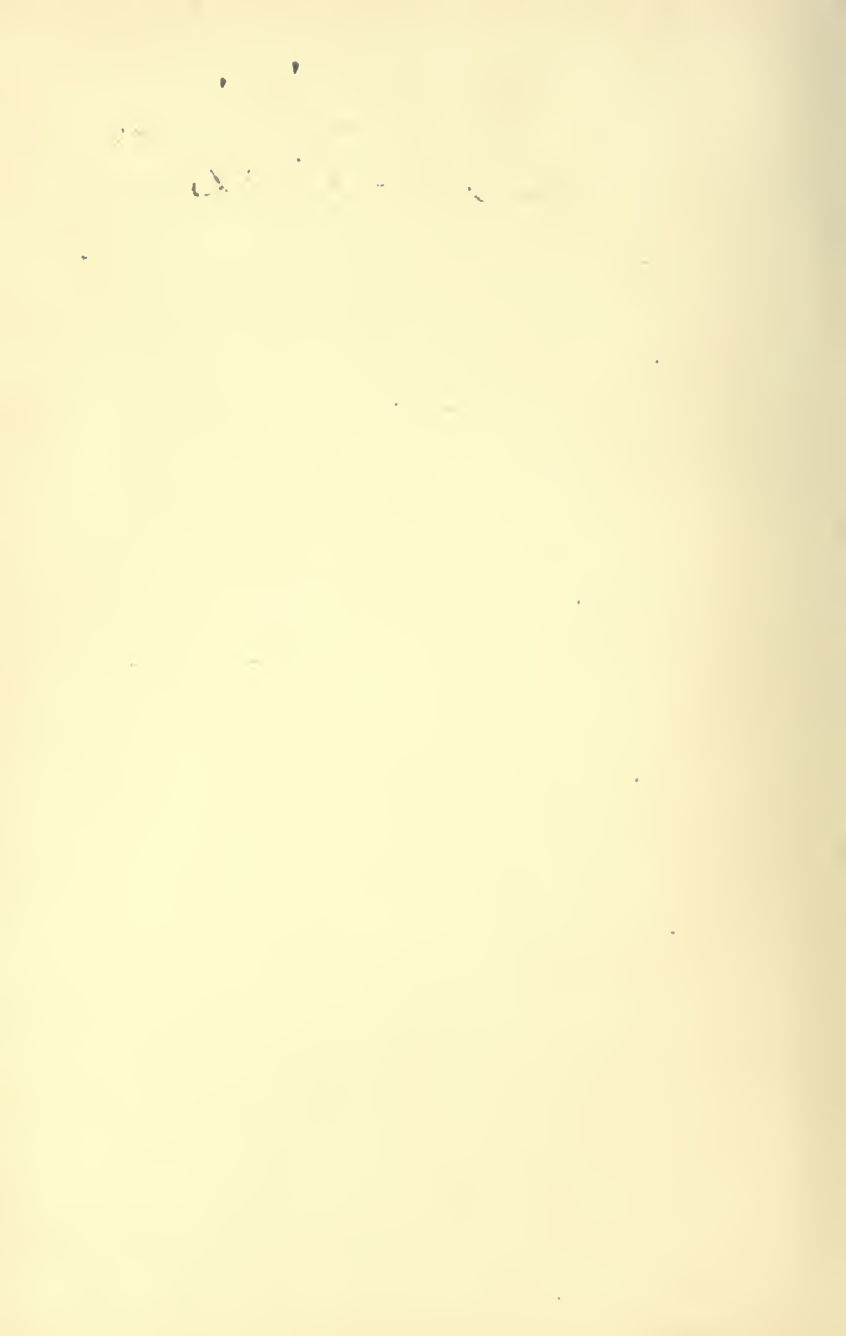


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THE BRAHMINS' TREASURE



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Alice B. Dickinson
Jan 11 - 1902



"I had my eye on the knife of the man who was sitting next to me."

THE
BRAHMINS' TREASURE

OR

*COLONEL
THORNDYKE'S
SECRET*

BY

GEORGE A. HENTY

Author of "Under Drake's Flag," "Bonnie Prince Charlie,"
"In Freedom's Cause," etc.



ILLUSTRATED BY

ELENORE PLAISTED ABBOTT

PHILADELPHIA

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1900

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THE BRAHMINS' TREASURE

CHAPTER I.

SQUIRE THORNDYKE, of the Manor House of Crawley, was, on the 1st of September, 1782, walking up and down the little terrace in front of the quaint old house in an unusually disturbed mood. He was a man of forty-three or four, stoutly and strongly built, and inclined to be portly. Save the loss of his wife four years before, there had been but little to ruffle the easy tenor of his life. A younger son, he had, at his mother's death, when he was three-and-twenty, come in for the small estate at Crawley, which had been her jointure.

For ten years he had led a life resembling that of most of his neighbours ; he had hunted and shot, been a regular attendant at any main of cocks that was fought within fifteen miles of Crawley, had occasionally been up to London for a week or two to see the gay things there, and had generally gone down of an evening to the inn,

where he talked over with two or three of his own condition, and a few of the better class of farmers, the news of the day, the war with the French, the troubles in Scotland, the alarming march of the young Pretender, and his defeat at Culloden ; with no very keen interest in the result, for the Southern gentry and yeomen, unlike those in the North, had no strong leanings either way. They had a dull dislike for Hanoverian George, but no great love for the exiled Stuarts, whose patron, the King of France, was an enemy of England.

More often, however, their thoughts turned upon local topics : the holding up of the coach of Sir James Harris or Squire Hamilton by highwaymen ; the affray between the French smugglers and the Revenue men near Selsea Bill or Shoreham ; the delinquencies of the poaching gangs ; the heaviness of the taxes, and the price of corn.

At the age of thirty-three Squire Thorndyke married the daughter of a neighbouring land-owner ; a son was born, and three years later Mrs. Thorndyke died. Since then the Squire had led a more retired life ; he still went down to smoke his pipe at the inn parlour, but he gave up his visits to town, and cock-fights and even bull-baiting were no longer attractions to him. He was known as a good landlord to the three or four farmers who held land under him ; was respected and liked in the village, where he was always ready to assist in cases of real distress ; was of an easy-going disposition and on good terms with all his neighbours.

But to-day he was unusually disturbed in his mind. A messenger had ridden up two hours before with a letter from London. It was as follows :

"MY DEAR BROTHER JOHN,—You will be surprised indeed at this letter from me, whom, doubtless, you suppose to be fighting in India. I have done with fighting, and am nearly done with life. I was shot in the battle of Buxar, eighteen months ago. For a time the surgeons thought that it was going to be fatal ; then I rallied, and for some months it seemed that, in spite of the ball that they were never able to find, I was going to get over it, and should be fit for service again. Then I got worse : first it was a cough, and the blood used to come up, and they said that the only chance for me was to come home. I did not believe it would be of any use, but I thought that I would rather die at home than in India, so home I came, and have now been a week in London.

"I thought at first of going down to my place at Reigate, and having you and your boy down with me, but as I have certainly not many weeks, perhaps not many days to live, I thought I would come down to you ; so the day after you receive this letter I shall be with you. I shall not bring my little girl down ; I have left her in good hands, and I shall only bring with me my Hindoo servant. He will give you no trouble : a mat to sleep on, and a little rice to eat will satisfy his wants, and he will take the trouble of me a good deal off your hands. He was a Sepoy in my regiment, and has always evinced the greatest devotion for me. More than once in battle he has saved my life, and has, for the last three years, been my servant, and has nursed me since I have been ill as tenderly as a woman could have done. As I shall have time to tell you everything when I arrive, I will say no more now."

The news had much affected John Thorndyke. His brother George was five years his senior, and had gone out as a cadet in the Company's service when John was but thirteen, and this was his first home-coming. Had it not been for a portrait that had been taken of him in his uniform just before he sailed, John would have had but little remembrance of him. In that he was represented as a thin, spare youth, with an expression of quiet determination in his face. From his father John had, of course, heard much about him.

"Nothing would satisfy him but to go out to India, John. There was, of course, no occasion for it, as he would have this place after me, a fine estate and a good position; what could he want more? But he was a curious fellow. Once he formed an opinion there was no persuading him to change it. He was always getting ideas such as no one else would think of; he did not care for anything that other people cared for; he never hunted nor shot; he used to puzzle me altogether with his ways, and 'pon my word I was not sorry when he said he would go to India, for there was no saying how he might have turned out if he had stopped here. He never could do anything like anybody else; nothing that he could have done would have surprised me.

"If he had told me that he intended to be a play-actor, or a jockey, or a pirate, or a book-writer, I would not have been surprised. Upon my word, it was rather a relief to me when he said, 'I have made up my mind to go into the East India service, father. I suppose you can get me a cadetship.' At least, that was an honourable profession, and I knew anyhow that

when he once said, 'I have made up my mind, father,' no arguments would move him, and that if I did not get him a cadetship he was perfectly capable of running away, going up to London, and enlisting in one of their white regiments."

John Thorndyke's own remembrances were that his brother had always been good-natured to him, that he had often told him long stories about Indian adventures, and that a short time before he went away, having heard that he had been unmercifully beaten by the school-master at Reigate for some trifling fault, he had gone down to the town, and had so battered the man that the school had to be closed for a fortnight. They had always kept up a correspondence. When he received the news of his father's death George had written to him, begging him to go down to Reigate, and to manage the estate for him.

"Of course," he said, "you will draw its income as long as you are there. I mayn't be back for another twenty years; one gets rich out here fast, what with plunder and presents and one thing and another, and it is no use to have money accumulating at home, so just live on the place as if it were your own, until I come home to turn you out."

John had declined the offer.

"I am very well where I am," he wrote, "and the care of the estate would be a horrible worry to me; besides, I have just married, and if I ever have any children they would be brought up beyond their station. I have done what I can for you. I have engaged an excellent man, who has been steward to Sir John Hieover, and

looked after the estate during his son's minority. But the young blade, on coming of age, set to work to make ducks and drakes of the property, and Newman could not bear to see the estate going to the Jews, so, as luck would have it, he resigned a month ago, and I went over as soon as I got your letter and appointed him, in your name, steward at Reigate. I think he will do the place justice in every way. Of course, if you don't like the arrangement you must write and say so ; it will be a year before I get your answer, and I have only engaged him for certain for that time, telling him that it must lie with you as to permanent arrangement."

So Newman had taken charge of the Reigate estate, and had continued to manage it ever since, although George had written home in great displeasure at his offer being refused.

Inside the Manor the bustle of preparations was going on ; the spare room, which had not been used for many years, was being turned out, and a great fire lighted to air it. John Thorndyke had sent a letter by the returning messenger to a friend in town, begging him to go at once to Leadenhall Street and send down a supply of Indian condiments for his brother's use, and had then betaken himself to the garden to think the matter over. The next day a post-chaise arrived, bringing the invalid and his coloured servant, whose complexion and Indian garb struck the maids with an awe not unmingled with alarm. John Thorndyke could hardly believe that the bent and emaciated figure was that of his brother, but he remembered the voice when the latter said, holding out his hand to him,—

"Well, brother John, here I am, what is left of me. Gracious, man ! who would have thought that you were going to grow up such a fine tall fellow. You are more fitted to be a soldier than I am. No, don't try to help me out ; Ramoo will do that, he is accustomed to my ways ; and I would as soon trust myself to a rogue elephant as to you."

"I am sorry to see you looking so badly, brother George."

"What must be, must ; I have had my fling, and after thirty years of marching and fighting I have no right to grumble if I am laid upon my back at last."

Leaning on Ramoo's arm, Colonel Thorndyke made his way into the house, and, when Ramoo had arranged the cushions of the sofa, took his place there in a half-reclining position.

"I am not always as bad as this, John," he said ; "the jolting of your confounded roads has been too much for me. If I were the king I would hang every fellow who had anything to do with them, contractors, boards of county magistrates, and the whole lot. If I had known what it was going to be like I would have hired a Sedan chair, and had myself carried down. That is what I have been doing in London ; but I would rather have had an Indian palkee that one could have lain down comfortably in."

"What shall I get you first, George ? I have got some lemons."

"I want something better than lemons, John. Have you any Burgundy handy?"

"Yes, plenty."

"If you give a bottle to Ramoo he will know how much water I want."

Here the servant entered with a tray with a chicken and a dish of kidneys.

"I sent up yesterday for some of the Indian things that you are accustomed to, George, but they have not come down yet."

"I brought a store down with me. This will do capitally for the present. Ramoo will do the cooking for me in the future. He need not go into the kitchen to scare the maids. I could see they looked at him as if he had been his infernal majesty, as he came in. He can do it anywhere; all he wants is an iron pot with some holes in it, and some charcoal: he can squat out there on the verandah, or, if it is bad weather, any shed will do for him. Well, it is nice to be home again, John," he went on, after he had eaten a few mouthfuls of chicken and drunk a tumbler of Burgundy and water. "I am glad to be back now I am here, though I daresay I should not have come home for another ten years if it had not been for this rascally bullet. Where is your boy?"

"He is away at school."

"Well, I think I will go up to bed at once, if you don't mind, John. I shall be fitter to talk in the morning."

The next day, indeed, Colonel Thorndyke was materially better. His voice was stronger and more cheery, and when he came down after breakfast he took his seat in an easy-chair instead of on the sofa.

"Now, brother," he said, "we will have a cosey chat.

There are several things I want done, but the chief of these is that when I am gone you should go down to Reigate, as I wanted you to do ten years ago. I want you to seem to be its master, as well as be its master, until Millicent comes of age, if not longer. Her name is Millicent Conyers Thorndyke. I wish her to be called Millicent Conyers, and to appear as your ward, and not as your niece and heiress of the property. If there is one thing in the world I have a greater horror of than another, it is of a girl being married for her money. I don't suppose that any one knows that I have a daughter; at any rate, none beyond a few Indian chums. She was sent home with an ayah under the charge of the widow of a comrade of mine. I had been away for months, and only went back to Calcutta in time to see her mother die. So that is all right."

"I could not do such a thing as that, George. I should be living under false colours. It is not that I mind so much leaving here and looking after the child's interest at Reigate, but I could not possibly take possession of the place as its owner when I should not be so. Besides, there are other objections. Mark would grow up supposing himself to be the heir."

"Mark will be all right. I have, since I have been in London, signed a will, leaving the rest of my fortune between them. I had it drawn up by our father's solicitors, relying upon your consent to do what I asked you. I have explained the matter to them, and given them the assignment, or whatever they call it, of the Reigate estate to you, until my daughter comes of age, appointing them her guardians should you die before

that. Thus, you will be placed in a proper position, and, should it be known by any means that the child is my daughter, that deed will still be a proof that you are carrying out my wishes, and are absolute master of the estate until she comes of age."

"I must think it all over, George. It is a singular proposal, and I own I would rather things went on in their regular course."

"Yes, yes, I understand that, John, but you see I have altogether set my mind on this matter. I want to know that my girl is not going to be married for her money; and, at any rate, that deed makes you master of the Reigate estates for the next thirteen years; so the only thing that I really want of you is to let the girl be called your ward instead of your niece, and that she and everyone else shall be in ignorance that she is an heiress. So far from doing the girl a wrong, you will be doing her a benefit; and, as I have explained the whole matter to our lawyers, no one can possibly think that the thing has been done from any motive whatever except that of affording me satisfaction."

"I will think the matter over," John repeated. "Of course, brother, it has been in your mind for some time, but it comes altogether fresh to me, and I must look at it in every light. For myself, I have no wish at all to become master of our father's estate. I have been going in one groove for the last twenty years, and don't care about changing it. You wished me to do so ten years ago, and I declined then, and the ten years have not made me more desirous of change than I was before."

"All right, think it over. Please send Ramoo in to me ; I have tired myself in talking."

John Thorndyke smoked many churchwarden pipes in the little arbour in his garden that day. In the afternoon his brother was so weak and tired that the subject of the conversation was not reverted to. At eight o'clock the colonel went off to bed. The next morning, after breakfast, he was brighter again.

"Well, John, what has come of your thinking?" he asked.

"I don't like it, George."

"You mayn't like it, John, but you will do it. I am not going to have my girl run after by ruined spend-thrifts who want her money to repair their fortunes, and I tell you frankly, if you refuse I shall go up to town to-morrow and I shall make a new will leaving all my property to your son, subject to a life annuity of £200 a year to the child, and ordering that, in the event of his dying before he comes of age, or of refusing to accept the provisions of the will, or handing any of the property or money over to my daughter, the whole estate, money, jewels, and all, shall go to the London hospitals, subject, as before, to the annuity.

"Don't be an ass, brother John. Do you think that I don't know what I am doing? I have seen enough of the evils of marrying for money out in India ; every ship that comes out brings so many girls sent out to some relation to be put on the marriage market, and marrying men old enough to be pretty nearly their grandfathers, with the natural consequence that there is the devil to pay before they have been married a

year or two. Come, you know you will do it ; why not give in at once and have done with it ? It is not a bad thing for you, it will be a good thing for your boy, it will save my girl from fortune-hunters, and enable me to die quietly and comfortably."

"All right, George, I will do it. Mind, I don't do it willingly, but I do it for your sake."

"That is right," Colonel Thorndyke said, holding out his thin, bronzed hand to his brother ; "that is off my mind. Now, there is only one other thing, those confounded jewels. But I won't talk about them now."

It was not, indeed, till three or four days later that the colonel again spoke to his brother on any than ordinary matters. He had, indeed, been very weak and ailing. After breakfast, when, as usual, he was a little stronger and brighter than later in the day, he said to his brother, suddenly,—

"I suppose there are no hiding-places in this room ?"

"Hiding-places ! What do you mean, George ?"

"Places where a fellow could hide up and hear what we are talking about."

"No, I don't think so," the Squire replied, looking round vaguely ; "such an idea never occurred to me. Why do you ask ?"

"Because, John, if there is such a thing as a hiding-place, someone will be sure to be hiding there. Where does that door lead to ?"

"It doesn't lead anywhere ; it used to lead into the next room, but it was closed up before my time, and turned into a cupboard, and this door is permanently closed."

“Do you mind stepping round into the next room and seeing if anyone is in the cupboard?”

Thinking that his brother was a little light-headed, John Thorndyke went into the next room and returned, saying, gravely, that no one was there.

“Will you look behind the curtains, John, and under this sofa, and everywhere else where even a cat could be hidden? That seems all right,” the colonel went on, as his brother continued the search. “You know there is a saying that walls have ears, and I am not sure that it is not so. I have been haunted with the feeling that everything I did was watched, and that everything I said was listened to, for years ; and I can tell you it is a devilishly unpleasant thought. Draw your chair quite close to me. It is about my jewels, John. I always had a fancy for jewels, not to wear them, but to own them. In my time I have had good opportunities in that way, both in the Madras Presidency and in the Carnatic. In the first place, I have never cared for taking presents in money ; but I have never refused jewels, and what with rajahs and nabobs and ministers that one had helped or done a good turn to somehow, a good deal came to me that way.

“Then I always made a point of carrying money with me, and after a defeat of the enemy or a successful siege there was always lots of loot, and the soldiers were glad enough to sell anything in the way of jewels for a tithe of their value in gold. I should say if I put the value of the jewels at £50,000 I am not much wide of the mark. That is all right ; there is no bother about them ; the trouble came from a diamond bracelet

that I got from a soldier. We were in camp near Tanjore. I was officer of the day. I had made my rounds and was coming back to my quarters when I saw a soldier come out of a tent thirty or forty yards away. It was a moonlight night, and the tent was one belonging to a white Madras regiment. Suddenly I saw another figure, that had been lying down outside the tent, rise. I saw the flash of the moonlight on steel, then there was a blow, and the soldier fell. I drew my sword and rushed forward.

“The native, for I could see that it was a native, was bending over the man he had stabbed. His back was towards me, and on the sandy soil he did not hear my footsteps until I was close to him ; then he sprang up with a cry of fury, and leapt on me like a tiger. I was so taken by surprise that before I could use my sword the fellow had given me a nasty stab on the shoulder, but before he could strike again I had run him through. By this time several other men ran out of the tent, uttering exclamations of rage at seeing their fallen comrade.

“‘What is it, sir?’ they asked me.

“‘This scoundrel, here, has stabbed your comrade,’ I said. ‘He did not see me coming, and I ran up just as he was, I think, rifling him for booty. He came at me like a wild cat, and has given me a nasty stab. However, I have put an end to his game. Is your comrade dead?’

“‘No, sir, he is breathing still, but I fancy there is little chance for him.’

“‘You had better carry him to the hospital tent at once ; I will send a surgeon there.’

"I called the regimental surgeon up, and went with him to the hospital tent, telling him what had happened. He shook his head after examining the man's wound, which was fairly between the shoulders.

" 'He may live a few hours, but there is no chance of his getting better.'

" 'Now,' I said, 'you may as well have a look at my wound, for the villain stabbed me, too.'

" 'You have had a pretty narrow escape of it,' he said, as he examined it. 'If he had struck an inch or two nearer the shoulder the knife would have gone right into you ; but you see I expect he was springing as he struck, and the blow fell nearly perpendicularly, and it glanced down over your ribs, and made a gash six inches long. There is no danger ; I will bandage it now, and to-morrow morning I will sew the edges together, and make a proper job of it.'

"In the morning one of the hospital attendants came to me and said the soldier who had been wounded wanted to speak to me. The doctor said he would not live long. I went across to him. He was on a bed some little distance from any of the others, for it was the healthy season, and there were only three or four others in the tent.

" 'I hear, Major Thorndyke,' he said, in a low voice, 'that you killed that fellow who gave me this wound, and that you yourself were stabbed.'

" 'Mine is not a serious business, my man,' I said. 'I wish you had got off as easily.'

" 'I have been expecting it, sir,' he said, 'and how I came to be fool enough to go outside the tent by my-

self I cannot think. I was uneasy, and could not sleep—I felt hot and feverish, and came out for a breath of fresh air. I will tell you what caused it, sir. About two years ago a cousin of mine, in one of the king's regiments, who was dying, they said, of fever (but I know the doctors thought he had been poisoned), said to me, "Here are some things that will make your fortune if ever you get to England; but I tell you beforehand they are dangerous things to keep about you. I fancy that they have something to do with my being like this now. A year ago I went with some others into one of their great temples on a feast day. Well, the god had got on all his trinkets, and among them was a bracelet with the biggest diamond I ever saw. I did not think so much of it at the time, but I kept on thinking of them afterwards, and it happened that some months after our visit we took the place by storm. I made straight for the temple, and I got the jewels. It don't matter how I got them—I got them. Well, since that I have never had any peace; pretty near every night one or other of our tents was turned topsy-turvy, all the kits turned out, and even the ground dug up with knives. You know how silently Indian thieves can work. However, nothing was ever stolen, and as for the bracelet, at the end of every day's march I always went out as soon as it was quite dark, and buried it between the tent pegs; it did not take a minute to do. When we moved, of course, I took it up again. At last I gave that up, for however early I turned out in the morning, there was sure to be a native about. I took then to dropping it down the barrel of

my gun ; that way I beat them. Still, I have always somehow felt myself watched, and my tent has been disturbed a great deal oftener than any of the others. I have had half a mind to throw the things away many a time, but I could not bring myself to do it."

" 'Well, sir, I have carried the bracelet ever since. I have done as he did, and always had it in my musket barrel. When we had fighting to do I would drop it out into my hand and slip it into my ammunition pouch ; but I know that I have always been followed just as Bill was. I suppose they found out that I went to see him before he died. Anyhow, my tent has been rummaged again and again. I have no doubt that fellow whom you killed last night had been watching me all the time, and thought that I had come out to hide the things. However, there they are, sir. One of my mates brought my musket here a quarter of an hour ago, and emptied the barrel out for me. Now, sir, you did your best to save my life last night, and you killed that fellow who did for me, and you pretty nearly got killed yourself.

" 'I have got no one else I could give the things to, and if I were to give them to one of my mates in the regiment they would probably cost him his life as they have cost me mine. But you will know what to do with the things ; they are worth a lot of money if you can get them home. Mind, sir, you have got to be careful. I have heard tales of how those priests will follow up a temple jewel that has been lost for years, and never give it up until they get it back again.'

" 'I ought to give it up,' I said.

“‘You don't know where it came from, sir,’ he replied. ‘I was one of a party of convalescents who were sent up just before that fight, and my own regiment was not there; it might have been here, and it might have been in the Carnatic. Bill never told me, and I have no more idea than a babe unborn.’

“The gems were certainly magnificent, and though I knew well enough that these untiring Brahmins would not be long in guessing that the things had come into my possession, I took the bracelet. I thought, anyhow, that I might have a few hours start; the fellow I had killed might, of course, have one or two others with him, but I had to risk that. I got leave an hour later, and went down to Madras and got them put into a place of safety. That I was watched all the time I was in India afterwards I have no doubt, but no attempts were made to assassinate me. They would have known that I went straight away, but whether I had buried them somewhere on the road, or had given them to someone's care at Madras they could not know, and there was therefore nothing for them to do but to wait till I made a move.

“I have no doubt whatever that they came over in the same ship with me. Two or three times during the week I was in London I saw coloured men in the street outside the hotel. Once it was a Lascar seaman, another time a dark-looking sailor in European clothes: he might pass for a Spaniard. Several times as I was going about in a Sedan chair I looked out suddenly, and each time there was a dark face somewhere in the street behind. I had a letter this morning from Clipstone, and he men-



"I looked out suddenly, and each time there was a dark face somewhere in the street behind."

tioned that two days ago his offices had been broken into, and every strong box and drawer forced open, but that, curiously enough, they could not find that anything had been stolen, though in the cashier's box there were £30 in gold. Of course it was my friend's. I have no doubt that one or two of them followed me down here ; and for anything I know, they may be lurking somewhere in your garden at the present moment,—that is, if they are not sitting bodily in this room."

John Thorndyke looked round with an uncomfortable feeling.

"How do you mean, George?"

"I mean some of those Indian fellows can do all sorts of wonderful conjuring tricks. I have seen them go up into the air on a rope and never come down again, and for aught I know they may be able to render themselves invisible. Seriously, I think that it is as likely as not."

"Well, and where are the things to be found now, George?"

"That I won't tell you, John. Before I go I will whisper it in your ear, and give you the means of finding them, but not till then. No, I will write it down on a piece of paper and slip it into your hand ; as soon as you get out of the room you glance at it, and then put the piece of paper into your mouth, chew it up, and swallow it. I tell you I dare not even whisper it ; but whatever you do, take no steps in the matter until your son comes of age."

"There can surely be no danger in another thirteen or fourteen years, George ; they will have given up the search long before that."

"Not they," the colonel said, emphatically. "If they die, others will take their places : it is a sacred business with them. My advice to you is, either sell them directly you get them into your hands, or go straight to Amsterdam and sell them there to one of the diamond-cutters, who will turn them out so that they will be altered beyond all recognition. Don't sell more than two stones at most to any one man ; then they will never come out as a bracelet again, and the hunt will be over."

"I would almost rather leave them alone altogether, George."

"Well, they are worth £50,000 if they are worth a penny, and a great deal more, I should say ; but you cannot leave them alone without leaving everything alone, for all my gems are with them, and £52,000 in gold. Of course, if you like, you can, when you get the box, pick those diamonds out and chuck them away, but if you do you must do it openly, so that anyone watching you may see you do it, otherwise the search will go on."

Two days later, as Ramoo was helping the colonel to the sofa, the latter was seized with a violent fit of coughing, then a rush of blood poured from his lips. His brother and Ramoo laid him on the sofa almost insensible.

"Run and get some water, Ramoo," John Thorndyke said.

As Ramoo left the room the colonel feebly placed his snuff-box in his brother's hand with a significant glance ; then he made several desperate efforts to speak, and tried to struggle up into a sitting position ; another gush of

blood poured from him, and as it ceased he fell back dead.

John Thorndyke was bitterly grieved at the death of his brother, and it was not until he went up to his room that night that he thought of the snuff-box that he had dropped into his pocket as his brother handed it to him. He had no doubt that it contained the instructions as to the treasure. It was of Indian manufacture ; he emptied the snuff from it, but it contained nothing else. He was convinced that the secret must be hidden there, and after in vain endeavouring to find a spring, he took a poker and hammered it, and as it bent a spring gave way, and showed a very shallow false bottom.

In this was a thin gold coin, evidently of considerable antiquity, and a small piece of paper, on which was written the word "Masulipatam." John Thorndyke looked at it in bewilderment ; that it was connected with the secret he felt certain, but alone it was absolutely useless. Doubtless his brother had intended to give him the key of the riddle when he had so desperately striven to speak. After in vain thinking the matter over he said,—

"Well, thank goodness, there is nothing to be done about the matter for another thirteen or fourteen years ; it is of no use worrying about it now."

He went to the old-fashioned cabinet and placed the coin and piece of paper in a very cunningly devised secret drawer. The next morning he went out into the garden and dropped the battered snuff-box into the well, and then dismissed the subject from his mind.



CHAPTER II.

STANDING some two miles out of Reigate is the village of Crowswood, a quiet place and fairly well to do, thanks in no small degree to Squire Thorndyke, who owned the whole of the parish, and by whom and his tenants the greater portion of the village were employed.

Greatly had the closing of the Manor House, after the death of old Squire Thorndyke, been felt. There were no more jellies, soups, and other comforts to be looked for in time of sickness, no abatement of rent when the bread-winner was sick or disabled, no check to the drunkards whom the knowledge that they would be turned out of their cottage at a week's notice kept in some sort of order. When, therefore, after ten years of absence of all government, John Thorndyke, after the death of his brother, the colonel, came down and took possession, he found the place sadly changed from what it had been when he had left it twenty years before. His first act was to dismiss Newman, who, completely

unchecked, had, he found, been sadly mismanaging affairs.

It was not long, however, before his hand made itself felt: two out of the three public-houses were shut up in six months; a score of their habitual frequenters had weeks before been turned out of their cottages; an order had been issued that, unless a cottage was kept in good order and the garden bright and blooming with flowers in the summer, a fresh tenant would be found for it. Every child must be sent to the village school; the Squire was ready to do what there was to be done in the way of thatching and white-washing, repairing palings, and painting doors and windows, but, as he told the people, the village had to be kept clean and decent, and anyone who would not conform to the rules was at liberty to leave without a day's notice.

No one rejoiced more at the coming home of the Squire than Mr. Bastow, the rector. He had had a pleasant time of it during the life of the old Squire. He was always a welcome guest at the house; old Mr. Thorndyke had been always ready to put his hand into his pocket for any repairs needed for the church, and bore on his shoulders almost the entire expense of the village school. In the latter respect there had been no falling off, he having given explicit instructions to his solicitors to pay his usual annual subscriptions to the school until his son's return from India. But with the death of the Squire the rector had gradually lost all authority in the village.

For a time force of habit had had its effect, but as this

wore out and the people recognised that he had no real authority, things went from bad to worse. Drunken men would shout jeeringly as they passed the rectory on their way home from the ale-house ; women no longer feared reproof for the untidiness of their houses and children ; the school was half emptied and the church almost wholly so.

For seven or eight years Mr. Bastow had a hard time of it. It was, then, both with pleasure as an old friend, and with renewed hopefulness for the village, that he visited John Thorndyke on his return. The change was almost instantaneous. As soon as it became known that the rector was backed, heart and soul, by the Squire's authority, and that a complaint from him was followed the next day by a notice to quit at the end of a week, his own authority was established as firmly as it had been in the old Squire's time, and in a couple of years Crowswood became quite a model village. Every garden blossomed with flowers ; roses and eglantine clustered over the cottages ; neatness and order prevailed everywhere. The children were tidily dressed and respectful in manner, the women bright and cheerful, and the solitary ale-house remaining had but few customers, and those few were never allowed to transgress the bounds of moderation. The Squire had a talk with the landlord a fortnight after his arrival.

"I am not going to turn you out, Peters," he said. "I hear that you make some efforts to keep your house decently ; the other two I shall send packing directly their terms are up. Whether you remain permanently must depend upon yourself. I will do up your house

for you and build a bar parlour alongside, where quiet men can sit and smoke their pipes and talk and take their beer in comfort, and have liberty to enjoy themselves as long as their enjoyment does not cause annoyance to other people or keep their wives and children in rags. I will do anything for you if I find the place well conducted; but I warn you that I will have no drunkenness. A man who, to my knowledge, gets drunk twice, will not get drunk a third time in this parish, and if you let men get drunk here it is your fault as much as theirs. Now we understand each other."

When the Squire was at home there was scarce an evening when the rector did not come up to smoke a pipe and take his glass of old Jamaica or Hollands with him.

"Look here, Bastow," the latter said, some three years after his return, "what are you going to do with that boy of yours? I hear bad reports of him from everyone; he gets into broils at the ale-house, and I hear that he consorts with a bad lot of fellows down at Reigate. One of my tenants—I won't mention names—complained to me that he had persecuted his daughter with his attentions. They say he was recognised among that poaching gang that had an affray with Sir James Hartrop's keepers. The thing is becoming a gross scandal."

"I don't know what to do about him, Squire; the boy has always been a trouble to me. You see, before you came home he got into bad hands in the village here; of course they have all gone, but several of them

only moved as far as Reigate, and he kept up their acquaintance. I thrashed him again and again, but he has got beyond that now, you see ; he is nearly eighteen, and openly scoffs at my authority. Upon my word, I don't know what to do in the matter."

"He is growing up a thorough young ruffian," the Squire said, indignantly, "and one of these mornings I expect to see him brought up before us charged with some serious offence. We had to fine him last week for being drunk and making a disturbance down at Reigate. Why do you let him have money? You may have no authority over him, but, at least, you should refuse to open your purse to him. Don't you see that this sort of thing is not only a disgrace to him, but very prejudicial to the village? What authority can you have for speaking against vice and drunkenness, when your son is constantly intoxicated?"

"I see that, Squire, none better ; and I have thought of resigning my cure."

"Stuff and nonsense, parson ! If the young fellow persists in his present course he must leave the village, that is clear enough ; but that is no reason why you should. The question is, what is to be done with him ? The best thing he could do would be to enlist. He might be of some service to his country, in India or the American colonies, but so far as I can see he is only qualifying himself for a gaol here."

"I have told him as much, Squire," Mr. Bastow said, in a depressed voice, "and he has simply laughed in my face and said that he was very comfortable where he was, and had no idea whatever of moving."

"What time does he go out in the morning?" John Thorndyke asked, abruptly.

"He never gets up till twelve o'clock, and has his breakfast when I take my dinner."

"Well, I will come in to-morrow morning and have a talk with him myself."

The next day the Squire rode up to the door of the rectory soon after one o'clock. Mr. Bastow had just finished his meal; his son, a young fellow of between seventeen and eighteen, was lolling in an easy-chair.

"I have come in principally to speak to you, young sir," John Thorndyke said, quietly. "I have been asking your father what you intend to do with yourself. He says he does not know."

The young fellow looked up with an air of insolent effrontery.

"I don't know that it is any business of yours, Mr. Thorndyke, what I do with myself."

"Oh, yes, it is," the Squire replied. "This village and the people in it are mine; you are disturbing the village with your blackguard conduct; you are annoying some of the girls on the estate, and altogether you are making yourself a nuisance. I stopped at the ale-house as I came here, and ordered the landlord to draw no more liquor for you; and unless you amend your conduct, and that quickly, I will have you out of the village altogether."

"I fancy, Mr. Thorndyke, that even as a justice of the peace you have not the power to dictate to my father who shall be the occupant of this house."

"What you say is perfectly true; but as you make

your father's life a burden to him, and he is desirous of your absence, I can and will order the village constable to remove you from his house by force, if necessary."

The young fellow cast an evil glance at his father.

"He has not been complaining, has he?" he said, with a sneer.

"He has not, sir," John Thorndyke said, indignantly; "it is I who have been complaining to him, and he admits that you are altogether beyond his authority. I have pointed out to him that he is in no way obliged to support you at your age in idleness and dissipation, and that it were best for him and all concerned that he should close his doors to you. I don't want to have to send the son of my old friend to prison, but I can see well enough that that is what it will come to if you don't give up your evil courses. I should think you know by this time that I am a man of my word. I have taken some pains to purge this village of all bad characters, and I do not intend to have an exception made of the son of the clergyman, who in his family, as well as in his own person, is bound to set an example."

"Well, Mr. Thorndyke, I utterly decline to obey your orders or to be guided by your advice."

"Very well, sir," the magistrate said, sternly. "Mr. Bastow, do I understand that you desire that your son shall no longer remain an inmate of your house?"

"I do," the clergyman said, firmly; "and if he does so I have no other course before me but to resign my living; my position here has become absolutely unbearable."

"Very well, sir, then you will please lock your doors

to-night, and if he attempts to enter, I, as a magistrate, should know how to deal with him. Now, young sir, you understand your position ; you may not take my advice ; nevertheless, I shall give it you. The best thing you can do is to take your place for town on the outside of the coach that comes through Reigate this afternoon, and to-morrow morning proceed either to the recruiting office for His Majesty's service, or to that for the East India Company's. You have health and strength, you will get rid at once of your bad associates, and will start afresh in a life in which you may redeem your past and be useful to your king and country."

Young Bastow smiled.

"Thanks," he said, sarcastically, "I have my own plans, and shall follow them."

"I think, Mr. Bastow," the Squire said, quietly, "it would be just as well for you to come home with me ; I don't think that the leave-taking is likely to be an affectionate one."

The rector rose at once.

"I will come with you, Squire. I may tell you now, what I have not told you before, that my son has more than once raised his hand against me, and that I do not care to be left alone with him."

"I judged him capable even of that, Mr. Bastow."

"Good-bye, Arthur," his father said ; "my heart is ready to break that it has come to this, but for both our sakes it is better so. Good-bye, my son, and may heaven lead you to better ways. If ever you come to me and say, 'Father I have turned over a new leaf, and heartily repent the trouble I have caused you,'

you will receive a hearty welcome from me, and no words of reproach for the past."

The young man paid no attention to the offered hand, but laughed scornfully.

"You have not got rid of me yet," he said. "As for you, Squire Thorndyke, I shall not forget your meddlesome interference, and some day, maybe, you will be sorry for it."

"I think not," John Thorndyke said, gravely. "I am doing my duty to the village, and still more I am doing my duty to an old friend, and I am not likely ever to feel any regret that I have so acted. Now, parson, let's be off."

After leaving the house with the clergyman, the Squire stopped at the house of Knapp, the village constable, and said a few words to him, then, leading his horse, walked home with Mr. Bastow.

"Don't be cast down, old friend," he said; "it is a terrible trial to you, but it is one sharp wrench, and then it will be over. Anything is better than what you must have been suffering for some time."

"I quite feel that, Squire; my life has, indeed, been intolerable of late. I had a painful time before, but always looked forward with hope to your brother coming home. Since you returned, and matters in the parish have been put straight, this trouble has come in to take the place of the other, and I have felt that I would rather resign and beg for charity than see my son going from bad to worse, a scandal to the parish, and a hinderance to all good work."

"It is a bad business, Bastow, and it seems to me

that two or three years in prison would be the best thing for him, as he will not take up the only trade open to him. At any rate, it would separate him from his evil associates, and give you peace while he is behind the bars. Where does he get his money?"

"That I know not, Squire. He takes some from me,—it used to be done secretly, now it is done with threats, and, as I told you, with violence,—but that would not account for his always having money. He must get it somewhere else, for when I have paid my bills, as I always do the hour that I receive money, there is but little over for him to take. He is often away all night, sometimes for two or three days together, and I dare not think what he does with himself, but certainly he gets money somehow, and I am afraid that I cannot hope that it is honestly obtained."

"I do not well see how it can be," the Squire agreed. "If I had before known as much as you tell me now, I would have taken some steps to have him watched, and to nip the matter before it went too far. Do you think that he will take your notice and come no more to the house?"

Mr. Bastow shook his head.

"I fear that the only effect will be to make him worse; even when he was quite a small boy punishment only had that effect with him. He will come back to-night probably half-drunk, and certainly furious at my having ventured to lay the case before you."

"You must lock the doors and bar the windows."

"I did that when he first took to being out at night, but he always managed to get in somehow."

“Well, it must be all put a stop to, Bastow, and I will come back with you this evening, and if this young rascal breaks into the house I will have him down at Reigate to-morrow on the charge of house-breaking ; or, at any rate, I will threaten to do so if he does not give a promise that he will in future keep away from you altogether.”

“I shall be glad, at any rate, if you will come down, Squire, for, to say the truth, I feel uneasy as to the steps he may take in his fury at our conversation just now.”

At nine o'clock John Thorndyke took down from the wall a heavy hunting whip, as he went out with the parson. He had in vain endeavoured to cheer his old friend as they sat over their steaming glasses of Jamaica. The parson had never been a strong man ; he was of a kindly disposition and an unwearied worker when there was an opportunity for work, but he had always shrunk from unpleasantness, and was ready to yield rather than bring about trouble. He had for a long time suffered in silence, and had not the Squire himself approached the subject of his son's delinquencies, he would have never opened his mouth about it. Now, however, that he had done so, and the squire had taken the matter in hand, and had laid down what was to be done, and though he trembled at the prospect, he did not even think of opposing his plan, and, indeed, could think of no alternative for it.

“I have told John Knapp to be here,” the Squire said, as they reached the house. “It is just as well that he should be present if your son comes back again. He

is a quiet, trustworthy fellow, and will keep his mouth shut if I tell him."

Mr. Bastow made no reply. It was terrible to him that there should be another witness to his son's conduct, but he saw that the Squire was right.

An old woman opened the door.

"Are all the shutters closed and barred?" John Thorndyke asked her.

"Yes, sir; I always sees to that as soon as it gets dark."

"Very well, you can go to bed now, Eliza," her master said. "Is John Knapp here?"

"Yes, sir; he came an hour ago, and is sitting in the kitchen."

"I will call him in myself when I want to speak to him."

As soon as the old servant had gone upstairs the Squire went into the kitchen, Mr. Bastow having gone to the cellar to fetch up a bottle of old brandy that was part of a two-dozen case given to him by the old Squire fifteen years before.

"Do you go round the house, John, and see that everything is properly fastened up. I see that you have got a jug of beer there. You had better get a couple of hours' sleep on that settle. I shall keep watch till I am sleepy, and then I will call you. Let me know if you find any of the doors or windows unbarred."

Five minutes later the constable knocked at the door of the parlour.

"The door opening into the stable-yard was unbarred, Squire."

"I thought it likely that it would be so, Knapp. You have made it fast now, I suppose. That is right; now lie down as I told you; it is scarce likely that he will be back until late. That was the old woman, of course," he went on to his companion when the door closed behind the constable. "I thought it likely enough that he might tell her to leave a way for him to come in; you told me that she had been with you a good many years. I dare say she has left that door unbarred for him many a time. I should advise you to get a man to sleep in the house regularly; there are plenty of fellows who will be glad to do it for a shilling or two a week; and I do not think that it is safe for you to be here alone."

An hour later he said to the rector,—

"Now, Bastow, you had best go to bed. I have taken the matter into my own hands, and will carry it through. However, I won't have him taken away without your being present, and will call you when we want you. Of course, if he will give a solemn promise not to molest you, and, even if he won't enlist, to leave this part of the country altogether, I shall let him off."

"There is one thing, Mr. Thorndyke, that I have not told you," the rector said, hesitatingly. "Sometimes, when he comes home late, he brings someone with him; I have heard voices downstairs. I have never seen who it was,—for what could I have done if I had gone down?—but I have heard horses brought round to the stable-yard and heard them ride away."

"It is just as well you told me," the Squire said, dryly. "If you had told me this evening at the house, I would have dropped a brace of pistols into my pocket. How-

ever, this hunting crop is a good weapon ; but I don't suppose they will show fight, even if anyone is with him ; besides, Knapp has a stout oaken cudgel with him. I noticed it standing against his chair as I went in ; and as he is a strong, active fellow, and we shall have the advantage of a surprise, I fancy we should be a match even for three or four of them."

At one o'clock the Squire roused John Knapp.

"It is one o'clock, John ; now take off your boots. I don't want him to know that there is anyone in the house till we get hold of him. I am going to lie down on the sofa in the parlour. The moment you hear footsteps you come and wake me."

The clock in the kitchen had just struck two when the constable shook John Thorndyke.

"There are two horses just coming into the yard."

"All right. I opened a window in the room looking down into the yard before I lay down. I will go up and see what they are going to do. If they try to break in anywhere down here, do you come at once quietly up to me."

The Squire had taken off his boots before he lay down, and holding his heavy hunting crop in his hand, he went quietly upstairs. As he went to the window he heard Arthur Bastow say, angrily,—

"Confound the old woman ! She has locked the door ; she has never played me that trick before. There is a ladder in the stable, and I will get in at that window up there and open it for you. Or you may as well come up that way, too, and then you can stow the things away in my room at once, and have done with it."

The Squire went hastily down.

"Come upstairs, Knapp," he whispered to the constable; "there are three of them, and I fancy the two mounted men are highwaymen. Let them all get in, keeping yourself well back from the window. The moon is round on the other side of the house, but it will be light enough for us to see them as they get in. I will take the last fellow, and I will warrant that he will give no trouble; then I will fall upon the second, and do you spring on young Bastow. The two highwaymen are sure to have pistols, and he may have some also. Give him a clip with that cudgel of yours first, then spring on him, and hold his arms tightly by his side. If I call you, give him a back heel and throw him smartly, and come to my aid. I don't think that I shall want it, but it is as well to prepare for anything."

They went upstairs and took their places, one on each side of the window, standing three or four feet back. Just as they took up their positions the top of the stable ladder appeared above the sill of the window. Half a minute later young Bastow's head appeared, and he threw up the sash still higher and stepped into the room; then he turned and helped two men in one after the other.

"Follow me," he said, "then you won't tumble over the furniture." As they turned, the heavy handle of John Thorndyke's whip fell with tremendous force on the head of the last man.

"What the devil!" the other exclaimed, snatching out a pistol and turning round, as the falling body struck him, but he got no further. Again the heavy whip de-

scended, this time on his right arm ; it dropped useless by his side, and the pistol fell from his hand. Then John Thorndyke fell upon him and bore him to the ground, snatched the other pistol from his belt, and held it to his head.

"Now, my man," he said, quietly, "if you don't surrender I will blow out your brains."

"I surrender," the man moaned. "I believe that you have broken my arm ; curse you, whoever you are."

The struggle between John Knapp and young Bastow was soon over. The young fellow was lithe and sinewy, but he was no match for the constable, who, indeed, had almost overpowered him before he was aware what had happened.

"Has he got pistols, Knapp?" the Squire asked.

"Yes, sir, a brace of them ; I have got them both safely in my pocket. There," he went on, as a sharp click was heard, "I have got the darbies on him. Now, shall I help you, sir?"

"You had better run downstairs first and light a couple of candles at the kitchen fire ; you will find a pair standing on the parlour table. Don't be long about it ; the first fellow I hit was stunned, and he may come round any moment."

"I will make sure of him before I go, Squire. I have got another pair of darbies in my pocket."

As soon as he had fastened these upon the wrists of the insensible man he ran downstairs, and in a minute returned with the candles.

"I am glad that you are back," the Squire said. "I was afraid that young rascal would try to escape."

"I took good care of that, Squire ; you see I put one of his arms round the bedpost before I slipped the darbies on, and he cannot get away unless he takes the whole bed with him, and as I don't think he would get it out either by the window or the door, he is as safe here as he would be in Newgate. What is the next thing to do, Squire?"

"You had better tie this fellow's legs. I will leave you a candle here, and you can keep guard over them while I go and wake Mr. Bastow."

The rector needed no waking ; he was walking up and down his room in great distress. He had not undressed, but had thrown himself upon his bed.

"What has happened, Thorndyke?" he asked, as the Squire entered. "I heard two heavy falls, and I felt that something terrible had taken place."

"Well, it has been a serious matter, very serious. That unfortunate son of yours is not hurt, but I don't know but that the best thing that could have happened would have been for him to have got a bullet through his head. He brought home with him two men who are, I have little doubt, highwaymen ; anyhow, each had a brace of pistols in his belt, and from what he said I think they have been stopping a coach. At any rate, they have something with them that they were going to hide here, and I fancy it is not the first time that it has been done. I don't expect your son had anything to do with the robbery, though he was carrying a brace of pistols too. However, we have got them all three.

"Now, you see, Bastow, this takes the affair alto-

gether out of our hands. I had hoped that when we caught your son in the act of breaking into your house after you had ordered him from it, we should be able to frighten him into enlisting, or, at any rate, into promising to disturb you no more, for even if we had taken him before the bench, nothing could have been done to him, for under such circumstances his re-entering the house could not be looked upon as an act of burglary. As it is, the affair is altogether changed. Even if I wished it, as a magistrate I could not release those two highwaymen. They must appear as prisoners in court. I shall hear down in the town to-morrow morning what coach has been stopped, and I have no doubt that they have on them the proceeds of the robbery. Your son was consorting with and aiding them, and acting as a receiver of stolen goods, and as you have heard horses here before, it is probable that when his room is thoroughly searched we shall come upon a number of articles of the same sort. I am sorry that I ever meddled in the matter ; but it is too late for that now. You had better come downstairs with me, and we will take a turn in the garden and try and see what had best be done."



CHAPTER III.

JOHN THORNDYKE opened the shutters of the parlour window, and stepped out into the garden alone, for the rector was too unnerved and shattered to go out with him, but threw himself on the sofa completely prostrated. Half an hour later, the Squire re-entered the room. The morning was just beginning to break. Mr. Bastow raised his head and looked sadly at him.

“I can see no way out of it, old friend. Were it not that he is in charge of the constable, I should have said that your only course was to aid your son to escape ; but Knapp is a shrewd fellow, as well as an honest one. You cannot possibly get your son away without his assistance, for he is handcuffed to the bed, and Knapp, in so serious a matter as this, would not, I am sure, lend himself to an escape. I have no doubt that with my influence with the other magistrates, and, indeed, on the circumstances of the case, they will commit him on a minor charge only, as the passengers of the coach will

no doubt give evidence that it was stopped by mounted men alone. I think I can get Knapp to hold his tongue as to your son having pistols on him when he arrested him, and I think, therefore, that he would only be charged with consorting with and aiding the highwaymen after the event, and of aiding them to conceal stolen goods, that is, if any are found in his room.

“That much stolen property has been hidden there, there is little reason to doubt, but it may have been removed shortly afterwards. It was, of course, very convenient for them to have some place where they could take things at once and then ride on quietly to London the next day, for, if arrested, nothing would be found upon them, and it would be impossible to connect them with the robbery. Later on they might have come back again and got them from him. Of course, if nothing is found in his room, we get rid of the charge of receiving altogether, and there would be nothing but harbouring, aiding, and abetting, a much less serious business. Look here, old friend, I will strain a point. I will go out into the garden again and walk about for an hour, and while I am out, if you should take advantage of my absence to creep up to your son's room and to search it thoroughly, examining every board on the floor, to see if it is loose, and should you find anything concealed, to take it and hide it, of course I cannot help it. The things, if there are any, might secretly be packed up by you in a box and sent up to Bow Street, with a line inside, saying that they are proceeds of robbery, and that you hope the owners will be traced and their property restored to

them. Not, of course, in your own hand, and without a signature. There might be some little trouble in managing it, but it could no doubt be done."

John Thorndyke went out into the garden without another word. The hour was nearly up when Mr. Bastow came out; he looked ten years older than he had done on the previous day; he wrung his friend's hand.

"Thank God, I have been up there!" he said. "I do not think they will find anything."

"Say nothing about it, Bastow. I don't want to know whether you found anything. Now I am going to fetch two or three of the men from the village, to get them to aid the constable in keeping guard, and another to go up to the house at once and order a groom to saddle one of my horses and bring it here."

As it was now past five o'clock, and the Squire found most of the men getting up, he sent one off to the house with the message and returned with two others to the rectory. He told them briefly that two highwaymen had been arrested during the night, and that as young Mr. Bastow was in their company at the time it had been necessary as a matter of form to arrest him also. He went upstairs with the two labourers.

"I have brought up two men to sit with you, Knapp, until the Reigate constables come up. You can take those handcuffs off Mr. Bastow, but see that he does not leave the room; and do you yourself sit in a chair against the door, and place one of these men at the window. How about the others?"

"The man you hit first, Squire, did not move until a quarter of an hour ago; he has been muttering to him-

self since, but I don't think he is sensible. The other one has been quiet enough, but there is no doubt that his arm is broken."

"I am going to ride down to Reigate at once, and will bring back a surgeon with me."

"You will repent this night's business, Thorndyke," Arthur Bastow said, threateningly.

"I fancy that you will repent it more than I shall, Bastow ; it is likely that you will have plenty of time to do so."

It was not long before the groom with the horse arrived. John Thorndyke went at a gallop to Reigate, and first called on the head constable.

"Dawney," he said, as the man came down, partially dressed, at his summons, "has anything taken place during the night?"

"Yes, Squire, the up coach was stopped a mile before it got here, and the passengers robbed. It was due here at one, and did not come in till half an hour later. Of course, I was sent for. The guard was shot. There were two of the fellows. He let fly with his blunderbuss, but he does not seem to have hit either of them, and one rode up and shot him dead ; then they robbed all the passengers. They got six gold watches, some rings, and, adding up the amounts taken from all the passengers, about £150 in money."

"Well, I fancy I've got your two highwaymen safe, Dawney."

"You have, sir?" the constable said, in astonishment.

"Yes. I happened to be at the rectory. Mr. Bastow

had had a quarrel with his son, and had forbidden him the house."

The constable shook his head.

"I am afraid he is a very bad one, that young chap."

"I am afraid he is, Dawney. However, his father was afraid that he might come in during the night and make a scene, so I said I would stop with him, and I took our village constable with me. At two o'clock this morning the young fellow came with two mounted men, whom I have no doubt are highwaymen. We had locked up down below. Bastow took a ladder, and the three got in at a bedroom window on the first floor. Knapp and I were waiting for them there, and, taking them by surprise, succeeded in capturing them before the highwaymen could use their pistols. The constable and two men are looking after them, but as one has not got over a knock I gave him on the head, and the other has a broken arm, there is little fear of their making their escape. You had better go up with two of your men and take a light cart with you with some straw in the bottom, and bring them down here. I will ride round myself to Mr. Chetwynde, Sir Charles Harris, and Mr. Merchison, and we will sit at twelve o'clock. You can send round a constable with the usual letters to the others, but those three will be quite enough for the preliminary examination."

"Well, Squire, that is good news, indeed. We have had the coach held up so often within five miles of this place during the past three months that we have been getting quite a bad name. And to think that young Bastow was in it! I have heard some queer stories

about him, and fancied before long I should have to put my hand upon his shoulder, but I didn't expect this."

"There is not a shadow of proof that he had anything to do with the robbery, Dawney, but he will have difficulty in proving that he did not afterwards abet them. It is serious enough as it is, and I am terribly grieved for his father's sake."

"Yes, sir; I have always heard him spoken of as a kind gentleman, and one who took a lot of trouble whenever any one was sick. Well, sir, I will be off in twenty minutes. I will run round at once and send Dr. Hewett to the rectory, and a man shall start on horse-back at seven o'clock with the summons to the other magistrates."

John Thorndyke rode round to his three fellow magistrates, who, living nearest to the town, were most regular in their attendance at the meetings. They all listened in surprise to his narrative, and expressed great pleasure at hearing that the men who had been such a pest to the neighbourhood, and had caused them all personally a great deal of trouble, had been captured. All had heard tales, too, of Arthur Bastow's disadvantage, and expressed great commiseration for his father. They agreed to meet at the court half an hour before business began, to talk the matter over together.

"It is out of the question that we can release him on bail," the gentleman who was chairman of the bench said.

"Quite so," John Thorndyke agreed. "In the first place, the matter is too serious, and in the next he certainly would not be able to find bail, and lastly, for his

father's sake, it is unadvisable that he should be let out ; at the same time, it appears to me that there is a broad distinction between his case and the others. I fear that there can be no question that he had prior acquaintance with these men, and that he was cognizant of the whole ; something I heard him say, and which, to my regret, I shall have to repeat in court, almost proves that he was so ; still, let us hope none of the stolen property will be found upon him ; whether they had intended to pass it over to his care or not is immaterial. If they had not done so, I doubt whether he could be charged with receiving stolen goods, and we might make the charge simply one of aiding these two criminals, and of being so far an accessory after the crime.

“If we could soften it down still further, I should, for his father's sake, be glad, but as far as he himself is concerned, I would do nothing to lighten his punishment ; he is about as bad a specimen of human nature as I ever came across. His father is in bodily fear of him. I saw him yesterday, and urged him to enlist in order to break himself loose from the bad companionship he had fallen into ; his reply was insolent and defiant in the highest degree, and it was then that in his father's name I forbade him the house, and, as his father was present, he confirmed what I said, and told him that he would not have anything more to do with him. This affair may do him good, and save his neck from a noose. A few years at the hulks or a passage to Botany Bay will do him no harm, and, at any rate, his father will have rest and peace, which he never would have if he remained here.”

A somewhat similar conversation took place at each house. John Thorndyke breakfasted at Sir Charles Harris's, the last of the three upon whom he called, and then mounting, rode back to Reigate.

"We have found the plunder on them," the head constable said, coming out of the lock-up as he drew rein before it, "and, fortunately for young Bastow, nothing was found upon him."

"How are the two men?"

"The fellow you hit is conscious now, sir, but very weak. The doctor says that if he hadn't had a thick hat on, your blow would have killed him to a certainty. The other man's arm is set and bandaged, and he is all right otherwise. We shall be able to have them both in court at twelve o'clock."

The Squire rode up to his house. He was met at the door by his son, in a state of great excitement.

"Is it all true, father? The news has come from the village that you have killed two men, and that they and Arthur Bastow have all been taken away in a cart, guarded by constables."

"As usual, Mark, rumour has exaggerated matters. There are no dead men; one certainly got a crack on the head that rendered him insensible for some time, and another's arm is broken."

"And are they highwaymen, father? They say that two horses were fastened behind the cart."

"That is what we are going to try, Mark. Until their guilt is proved, no one knows whether they are highwaymen or not."

"And why is Arthur Bastow taken, father?"

"Simply because he was in company with the others. Now, you need not ask any more questions, but if you like to get your pony saddled and ride down with me to Reigate at eleven o'clock, I will get you into the court-house, and then you will hear all about it."

At greater length the Squire went into the matter with Mrs. Cunningham, his lady housekeeper, and his ward's governess.

"It is a bad business, Mr. Thorndyke," she said, "and must be terrible for poor Mr. Bastow."

"Yes, terrible. I sincerely hope that they will not summon him, but I am afraid that there is very little doubt about it; they are sure to want to know about his son's general conduct, though possibly the testimony on that point of the constable at Reigate will be sufficient. My own hope is that he will get a long sentence; at any rate, one long enough to ensure his not coming back during his father's lifetime. If you had seen his manner when we were talking to him yesterday, you would believe that he is capable of anything. I have had a good many bad characters before me during the year and a half that I have sat upon the bench, but I am bound to say that I never saw one that was to my eyes so thoroughly evil as this young fellow. I don't think," he added, with a smile, "that I should feel quite comfortable myself if he were acquitted; it will be a long time before I shall forget the expression of his face when he said to me this morning, 'You will repent this nights' work, Thorndyke.'"

"It is all very shocking," the lady said. "What will poor Mr. Bastow do? I should think that he would

not like to remain as clergyman here, where everyone knows about it."

"That must be for him to decide," the Squire said ; "but if he wishes to resign I certainly shall not press him to continue to hold the living. He is a very old friend of mine. My father presented the living to him when I was nine or ten years old, and I may say I saw him daily up to the time when I went down into Sussex. If he resigns, I should urge him to take up his residence here, and to act as Mark's tutor ; and he might also relieve you of some of Millicent's lessons. You have plenty to do in looking after the management of things in general. However, that is for the future."

At eleven o'clock the Squire drove down to Reigate, taking Mark with him. "It will save all bother about putting up the horse and pony."

On arriving, he handed Mark over to the head constable and asked him to pass him into a seat in the court-house before the public were let in. Reigate was in a state of unusual unrest. That the coach should have been stopped and robbed was too common an event to excite much interest, but that two highwaymen should have been captured and, as was rumoured, a young gentleman brought in on a charge of being in connection with them, caused a thrill of excitement. Quite a small crowd was assembled before the court-house, and the name of Squire Thorndyke passed from mouth to mouth.

All this added to the desire of those around to get into the court, and there was quite a rush when the doors were opened two minutes before twelve, and it

was at once crammed, the constable having some difficulty in getting the doors shut, and in persuading those who could not get in that there was not standing room for another person. There was a buzz in court until the door opened and six magistrates came in. It was observed that John Thorndyke did not seat himself with the others, but moved his chair a little apart from them, thus confirming the report that he was in some way connected with the matter, and did not intend to take any part in the decision.

Then another door opened and the three prisoners were brought in. The two first were pale and evidently weak ; one had his head wrapped in bandages, the other had the right sleeve of his coat cut off, and his arm bandaged and supported by a sling.

Both made a resolute effort to preserve a careless demeanour. The third, who was some years younger than the others, looked round with a smile on his lips, bowed to the magistrates with an air of insolent bravado when he was placed in the dock, and then leant easily in the corner, as if indifferent to the whole business. A chair was placed between his comrades for the use of the man whose head was bandaged. Many among those present knew Arthur Bastow by sight, and his name passed from mouth to mouth, but the usher called loudly for silence, and then the magistrates' clerk rose.

"William Smith and John Brown—at least these are the names given—are charged with stopping the South Coast coach last night, killing the guard, and robbing the passengers ; and Arthur Bastow is charged with

aiding and abetting the other two prisoners, and with guilty knowledge of their crime."

It was noticed by those who could see the prisoners' faces, that, in spite of Bastow's air of indifference, there was an expression of anxiety on his face as the charge was read, and he undoubtedly felt relief as that against himself was mentioned. The first witness was John Knapp, and the constable stepped into the witness box.

"What do you know of this business, Knapp?" the chairman asked. "Just tell it your own way."

"I am constable of Crowswood, your honour, and yesterday Squire Thorndyke said to me——"

"No, you must not tell it like that, Knapp; you must not repeat what another person said to you. You can say that from information received you did so and so."

"Yes, your honour. From information received I went to the Rev. Mr. Bastow's house, at a quarter to nine last night. At nine o'clock Squire Thorndyke and the parson came in together. They sent the servant up to bed, and then the Squire sent me round to examine the fastenings of the doors. I found that one back door had been left unfastened, and locked and bolted it. The Squire told me to lie down until one o'clock, and he would watch, and Mr. Bastow went up to bed."

"Do you know of your own knowledge why these precautions were taken?"

"Only from what I was told, your honour. At one o'clock the Squire woke me, and he lay down in the parlour, telling me to call him if I heard any movement

outside. About two o'clock I heard two horses come into the parson's yard. I called Squire Thorndyke, who went upstairs to an open window ; presently someone came and tried the back door. I heard voices outside, but could not hear what was said. The Squire came down and called me upstairs. I went up and took my place at one side of the window, and the Squire took his on the other. I had this cudgel in my hand and the Squire his riding whip. A ladder was put up against the window and then someone came up, lifted the sash up high, and got in. There was light enough for me to see it was young Mr. Bastow. Then the two other prisoners came up. When the third had got into the room Mr. Bastow said, 'Follow me, and then you won't tumble over the furniture.'"

"How was it that they did not see you and Mr. Thorndyke?" the chairman asked.

"We were standing well back, your honour ; the moon was on the other side of the house. There was light enough for us to see them as they got in at the window, but where we were standing it was quite dark, especially to chaps who had just come in from the moonlight. As they moved, the Squire hit the last of them a clout on the head with his hunting crop, and down he went, as if shot. The man next to him turned, but I did not see what took place, for, as the Squire had ordered me, I made a rush at Mr. Bastow and got my arms round him pretty tight, so as to prevent him using his pistols if he had any. He struggled hard, but without saying a word, till I got my heel behind his and threw him on his back. I came down on the top of

him, then I got the pistols out of his belt and threw them on the bed, slipped the handcuffs on to one wrist, lifted him up a bit, and then shoved him up against the bedpost, and got the handcuff on to his other wrist, so that he could not shift away, having the post in between his arms.

“Then I went to see if the Squire wanted any help, but he didn't. I first handcuffed the man whose head he had broken, and tied the legs of the other, and then kept guard over them till morning. When the constables came up from town we searched the prisoners, and on two of them found the watches, money, and rings. We found nothing on Mr. Bastow but two pistols. I went with the head constable to Mr. Bastow's room and searched it thoroughly, but found nothing whatever there.”

The evidence created a great sensation in court. John Thorndyke had not carried out his first intention of asking the witness not to make any mention of the fact that Arthur Bastow was carrying pistols. The more he had thought over the matter, the more convinced was he that the heavier the sentence the better it would be for the rector, and when he had heard from the latter that there was nothing left in his son's room that could be brought against him, and that he could not be charged with the capital crime of being a receiver, he thought it best to let matters take their course.

The head constable was the next witness. He deposed to the finding of the articles produced upon the two elder prisoners and the unsuccessful search of the younger prisoner's room.

"You did not search the house further?" the chairman enquired.

"No, sir; I wanted to get the prisoners down here as fast as I could, seeing that two of them were seriously hurt."

The chairman nodded.

"You will, of course, make a careful search of the whole house, constable."

"Yes, sir; I left one of my men up there with instructions to allow no one to go upstairs until I returned."

"Quite right."

John Thorndyke was the next witness, and his evidence cleared up what had hitherto been a mystery to the general body of the public, as to how he and the constable happened to be in the house on watch when the highwaymen arrived. The most important part of his evidence was the repetition of the words young Bastow had used as he mounted the ladder, as they showed that it was arranged between the prisoners that the stolen goods should be hidden in the house. The Squire was only asked one or two questions.

"I suppose, Mr. Thorndyke, that you had no idea whatever that the younger prisoner would be accompanied by anyone else when he returned home?"

"Not the slightest," the Squire replied. "I was there simply to prevent this unfortunate lad from entering the house, when perhaps he might have used violence towards his father. My intention was to seize him if he did so, and to give him the choice of enlisting, as I had urged him to do, or of being brought before this bench for breaking into his father's house. I felt that anything

was better than his continuing in the evil courses on which he seemed bent."

"Thank you, Mr. Thorndyke. I must compliment you in the name of my brother magistrates, and I may say of the public, for the manner in which you, at considerable risk to yourself, have effected the capture of the two elder prisoners."

After consulting with the others the head constable was recalled.

"Do you know anything about the character of the younger prisoner?"

"Yes, sir. We have had our eye upon him for some time. He was brought before your honours a week ago, charged with being drunk and disorderly in this town, and was fined £5. He is constantly drinking with some of the worst characters in the place, and is strongly suspected of having been concerned in the fray between the poachers and Sir Charles Harris's game-keepers. Two of the latter said that they recognised him amongst the poachers, but as they both declined to swear to him we did not arrest him."

John Knapp was then recalled, and testified to Bastow's drinking habits, and that the landlord of the ale-house at Crowswood had been ordered by the Squire not to draw any liquor for him in the future on pain of having the renewal of his license refused.

"Have you any more witnesses to call?" the chairman asked the head constable.

"Not at present, your honour. We have sent up to town, and on the next occasion the coachman will be called to testify to the shooting of the guard, and we

hope to have some of the passengers here to identify the articles stolen from them."

"It will be necessary that the Rev. Mr. Bastow should be here. He need not be called to give evidence unless we think it to be of importance, but he had better be in attendance. The prisoners are remanded until this day week."

An hour later the three prisoners, handcuffed, were driven under an escort of three armed constables to Croydon gaol. When again brought up in court the passengers on the coach identified the articles taken from them, the coachman gave evidence of the stopping of the coach and of the shooting of the guard. The head constable testified that he had searched the rectory from top to bottom and found nothing whatever of a suspicious nature. None of the passengers were able to testify to the two elder prisoners as the men who had robbed them, as these had been masked, but the height and dress corresponded to those of the prisoners, and the two Bow Street runners then came forward and gave evidence that the two elder prisoners were well known to them. They had long been suspected of being highwaymen, and had several times been arrested when riding towards London on occasions when a coach had been stopped the night before, but no stolen goods had ever been found upon them, and in no case had the passengers been able to swear to their identity. One was known among his associates as "Galloping Bill," the other as the "Downy One."

At the conclusion of the evidence the three prisoners were formally committed for trial, the magistrates having

retired in consultation for some time upon the question of whether the charge of receiving stolen goods ought to be made against Arthur Bastow.

Mr. Bastow had not been called as a witness. John Thorndyke had brought him down to Reigate in a closed carriage, and he had waited in the justices' room while the examination went on; but the magistrates agreed that the evidence given was amply sufficient for them to commit upon without giving him the pain of appearing. John Thorndyke had taken him to another room while the magistrates were consulting together, and when he heard the result drove him back again.

"I have fully made up my mind to resign my living, Thorndyke. I could not stand up and preach to the villagers of their duties when I myself have failed so signally in training my own son; nor visit their houses and presume to lecture them on their shortcomings when my son is a convicted criminal."

"I quite see that, old friend," the Squire said. "And I had no doubt but that you would decide on this course. I will not try to persuade you to change your decision, for I feel that your power of usefulness is at an end as far as the village is concerned. May I ask what you propose to do? I can hardly suppose that your savings have been large."

"Two years ago I had some hundreds laid by, but they have dwindled away to nothing; you can understand how. For a time it was given freely, then reluctantly; then I declared I would give no more, but he took it all the same—he knew well enough that I could never prosecute him for forgery."

"As bad as that, eh?" Thorndyke said, sternly. "Well, we won't talk further of him now; what I propose is, that you should take up your abode at the Hall. I am not satisfied with the school where Mark has been for the last two years, and I have been hesitating whether to get a private tutor for him or to send him to one of the public schools, I know that that would be best, but I could not bring myself to do so. I have some troubles of my own that but two or three people know of, and now that everything is going on smoothly on the estate and in the village, I often feel dull, and the boy's companionship does me much good; and as he knows many lads of his own age in the neighbourhood now, I think that he would do just as well at home.

"He will be taking to shooting and hunting before long, and if he is to have a tutor, there is no one I should like to have better than yourself. You know all the people, and we could talk comfortably together of an evening when the house is quiet. Altogether it will be an excellent arrangement for me. You would have your own room, and if I had company you need not join them unless you liked. The house would not seem like itself without you, for you have been associated with it as long as I can remember. As to your going out into the world at the age of sixty, it would be little short of madness. There—you need not give me an answer now," he went on, seeing that the rector was too broken down to speak, "but I am sure that when you think it over you will come to the same conclusion that I do,—that it will be the best possible plan for us both."



CHAPTER IV.

THE trial of the two highwaymen and Arthur Bastow came off in due course. The evidence given was similar to that at Reigate, the only addition being that Mr. Bastow was himself put into the box. The counsel for the prosecution said,—

“I am sorry to have to call you, Mr. Bastow; we all feel most deeply for you, and I will ask you only two or three questions. Was your son frequently out at night?”

“He was.”

“Did you often hear him return?”

“Yes; I seldom went to sleep until he came back.”

“Had you any reason to suppose that others returned with him?”

“I never saw any others.”

“But you might have heard them without seeing them. Please tell us if you ever heard voices?”

“Yes, I have heard men’s voices,” the clergyman said, reluctantly, in a low voice.

"One more question, and I have done. Have you on some occasions heard the sound of horses' hoofs in your yard at about the time that your son came in?"

"I have," said Mr. Bastow, in a low voice.

"Had you any suspicion whatever of the character of your son's visitors?"

"None whatever. I supposed that those with him were companions with whom he had been spending the evening."

Mr. Bastow had to be assisted from the witness-box, so overcome was he with the ordeal. He had not glanced at his son while giving his evidence; the latter and his two fellow-prisoners maintained throughout the trial their expression of indifference. The two highwaymen nodded to acquaintances they saw in the body of the court, smiled at various points in the evidence, and so conducted themselves that there were murmured exclamations of approval of their gameness on the part of the lower class of the public. The jury, without a moment's hesitation, found them all guilty of the offences with which they were charged. Bastow was first sentenced.

"Young man," the judge said, "young as you are, there can be no doubt whatever in the minds of anyone who has heard the evidence that you have been an associate with these men who have been found guilty of highway robbery accompanied by murder. I consider that a merciful view was taken of your case by the magistrates who committed you for trial, for the evidence of your heart-broken father, on whose grey hairs your conduct has brought trouble and disgrace, leaves

no doubt that you have for some time been in league with highwaymen, although not actually participating in their crime. The words overheard by Mr. Thorndyke show that you were prepared to hide their booty for them, and it is well for you that you were captured before this was done, and that no proceeds of other robberies were found in the house. The evidence of the Bow Street officers show that it had for some time been suspected that these men had an accomplice somewhere in the neighbourhood of Reigate, for although arrested several times under circumstances forming a strong assumption of their guilt, nothing was ever found upon them. There can now be little doubt who their accomplice was. Had you been an older man I should have sentenced you to transportation for life, but in consideration of your youth, I shall take the milder course of sentencing you to fifteen years' transportation."

The capital sentence was then passed in much fewer words upon the two highwaymen. As they were leaving the dock, Bastow turned, and, in a clear voice, said to John Thorndyke, who had been accommodated with a seat in the well of the court,—

"I have to thank you, Thorndyke, for this. I will pay off my debt some day, you may take your oath."

Mr. Bastow, as soon as he had given his evidence, had taken a hackney coach to the inn where he and the Squire had put up on their arrival in town the evening before, and here, on his return, John Thorndyke found him. He was lying on his bed in a state of prostration.

"Cheer up, Bastow," he said, putting his hand upon the rector's shoulder, "the sentence is fifteen years,

which was the very amount I hoped that he would get. The more one sees of him the more hopeless it is to expect that any change will ever take place in him, and it is infinitely better that he should be across the sea, where his conduct, when his term is over, can affect no one ; the disgrace, such as it is, to his friends, is no greater in a long term than in a short one. Had he got off with four or five years' imprisonment, he would have been a perpetual trouble and a source of uneasiness, not to say alarm ; and even had he left you alone, we should always have been in a state of dread as to his next offence ; better that he should be out in the colonies than be hanged at Tyburn."

"How did he take the sentence?"

"With the same bravado he had shown all through, and as he went out of the dock he addressed a threat to me that, under the circumstances, I can very well afford to despise. Now, if you will take my advice, you will drink a couple of glasses of good port and then go to bed. I will see to your being awakened at seven o'clock, which will give us time to breakfast comfortably and to make a start at nine."

The rector ate a biscuit, mechanically sipped another glass of wine, and was even able to eat a kidney when they were brought up. Although September was not yet out, the Squire had a fire lighted in the room, and after the meal was over, and two steaming tumblers of punch were placed upon the table, he took a long pipe from the mantel, filled and lighted it, then filled another, and handed it to the rector, at the same time holding out a light to him.

"Life has its consolations," he said. "You have had a lot of trouble one way and another, Bastow, but we may hope that they are all over now, and that life will go more smoothly and easily with you ; we had better leave the past alone for the present. I call this snug: a good fire, a clean pipe, a comfortable chair, and a steaming bowl at one's elbow."

The rector smiled faintly.

"It seems unnatural," he began.

"Not at all, not at all," the Squire broke in ; "you have had a tremendous load on your mind, and now it is lifted off ; the thunder cloud has burst, and, though damage has been done, one is thankful that it is no worse. Now I can talk to you of a matter that has been on my mind for the last three weeks. What steps do you think that I ought to take for finding a successor for you? It is most important to have a man who will be a real help in the parish, as you have been, would pull with one comfortably, and be a pleasant associate. I don't want too young a fellow, and I don't want too old a one. I have no more idea how to set about it than a child. Of course, I could ask the bishop to appoint, but I don't know that he would appoint at all the sort of man I want. The living is only worth £200 a year and the house, no very great catch, but there is many a man that would be glad to have it."

"I have been thinking it over, too, Thorndyke, when I could bring my mind to consider anything but my own affairs. How would Greg do? He has been taking duty for me since I could not do it myself. I

know that he is a hard-working fellow, and he has a wife and a couple of children ; his curacy is only £70 a year, and it would be a perfect Godsend, for he has no influence in the church, and he might be years without preferment."

"I should think he would do very well, Bastow. Yes, he reads well, which I own I care for a good deal more than the preaching ; not that I have anything to say against that ; he gives sound and practical sermons, and they have the advantage of being short, which is a great thing. In the first place, it is good in itself, and in the second, specially important in a village congregation, where you know very well every woman present is fidgeting to get home to see that the pot is not boiling over, or the meat in the oven is not burnt.

"Yes, I will go down to-morrow afternoon and ask him if he would like the living. You were talking of selling the furniture ; how much do you suppose it is worth ?"

"I don't suppose it will fetch above £70 or £80 ; it is solid and good, but as I have had it in use nearly forty years, it would not go for much."

"Well, let us say £100," the Squire said. "I will give you a cheque for it. I daresay Greg will find it difficult to furnish, and he might have to borrow the money, and the debt would be a millstone round his neck, perhaps, for years, so I will hand it over with the rectory to him."

So they talked for an hour or two on village matters, and the Squire was well pleased, when his old friend went up to bed, that he had succeeded in diverting his

thoughts for a time from the painful subject that had engrossed them for weeks.

"You have slept well," he said, when they met at breakfast ; "I can see by your face."

"Yes ; I have not slept so soundly for months. I went to sleep as soon as my head touched the pillow, and did not wake until the chamber-maid knocked at my door."

"That second glass of punch did it, Bastow. It is a fine morning ; we shall have a brisk drive back. I am very glad that I changed my mind and brought the gig instead of the close carriage."

In the afternoon the Squire drove into Reigate. He found the curate at home, and astonished and delighted him by asking him if he would like the living of Crowswood. It came altogether as a surprise to him, for the rector's intentions to resign had not been made public, and it was supposed in the village that he was only staying at the Squire's until this sad affair should be over. Greg was a man of seven- or eight-and-twenty, had graduated with distinction at Cambridge, but having no influence, had no prospects of promotion, and the offer almost bewildered him.

"I should be grateful, indeed, Mr. Thorndyke," he said. "It would be a boon to us. Will you excuse me for a moment?" And opening a door, he called for his wife, who was trying to keep the two children quiet there, having retired with them hastily when Mr. Thorndyke was announced. "What do you think, Emma?" her husband said, excitedly, as she came into the room. "Mr. Thorndyke has been good enough to offer me the

living of Crowswood." Then he recovered himself. "I beg your pardon, sir, for my unmannerliness in not first introducing my wife to you."

"It was natural that you should think of telling her the news first of all," the Squire said, courteously. "Madam, I am your obedient servant, and I hope that soon we shall get to know each other well. I consider it of great importance that the squire of a parish and the rector should work well together, and see a great deal of each other. I don't know whether you are aware, Mr. Greg, that the living is worth £200 a year, besides which there is a paddock of about ten acres, which is sufficient for the keep of a horse and cow. The rectory is a comfortable one, and I have arranged with Mr. Bastow that he shall leave his furniture for the benefit of his successor. It will include linen, so that you will be put to no expense whatever in moving in. I have known these first expenses to seriously cripple the usefulness of a clergyman when appointed to a living."

"That is kind of you, indeed, Mr. Thorndyke," the curate said. "We have been living in these lodgings since we first came here, and it will, indeed, make matters easy to have the question of furniture so kindly settled for us."

"Will your rector be able to release you shortly?"

"I have no doubt that he will do that at once. His son has just left Oxford and taken deacon's orders, and the rector told me that he should be glad if I would look out for another curacy, as he wanted his son here with him. He spoke very kindly, and said that he should make no change until I could hear of a place to

suit me. His son has been assisting him for the last month, since I took the services at Crowswood, and I am sure he would release me at once."

"Then I should be glad if you will move up as soon as possible to the rectory. I know nothing about the necessary forms, but I suppose that Mr. Bastow will send in his resignation to the bishop, and I shall write and tell him that I have appointed you, and you can continue to act as you have done until you can be formally inducted as the rector. Perhaps you would not mind going round to your rector at once and telling him of the offer you have had. I have one or two matters to do in the town, and will call again in three-quarters of an hour. I shall be glad to tell Mr. Bastow that you will come into residence at once."

Never were a pair more delighted than Parson Greg and his wife when two days later they took possession of their new home, half a dozen women having been at work the day before, and everything being in perfect order. To Mrs. Greg's relief she found that the old servant had already gone, the Squire having himself informed her that Mrs. Greg would bring her own maid with her. Mr. Bastow said that he would allow her half a crown a week as long as she lived, and the Squire added as much more, and as the woman had saved a good deal during her twenty years' service with the rector, she was perfectly satisfied.

The news of the change at the rectory naturally occasioned a great deal of talk. At first there was a general feeling of regret that Mr. Bastow had gone, and yet it was felt that he could not have been expected to stay ;

the month's experience that they had had of the new parson had cleared the way for him. He and his wife soon made themselves familiar with the villagers, and, being bright young people, speedily made themselves liked. The Squire and Mrs. Cunningham called the first afternoon after their arrival.

"You must always send up if anything is wanted, Mr. Greg ; whenever there is any illness in the village, we always keep a stock of soups and jellies, and Mrs. Cunningham is almoner in general. Is there anything that we can do for you? If so, let me know without hesitation."

"Indeed, there is nothing, Mr. Thorndyke. It is marvellous to us coming in here and finding everything that we can possibly want."

Mr. and Mrs. Greg dined regularly at the Squire's once a week.

"Have you had that Indian servant of yours long, Mr. Thorndyke?" Mrs. Greg asked one day. "He is a strange-looking creature. Of course, in the daytime, when one sees him about in ordinary clothes, one does not notice him so much, but of an evening in that Eastern costume of his he looks very strange."

"He was the servant of the colonel, my brother," the Squire replied. "He brought him over from India with him. The man had been some years in his service and was very attached to him, and had saved his life more than once, he told me. On one occasion he caught a cobra by the neck as it was about to strike my brother's hand as he sat at table ; he carried it out into the compound, as George called it, but which means,

he told me, garden, and there let it escape. Another time he caught a thug, which means a sort of robber who kills his victims by strangling before robbing them. They are a sort of sect who regard strangling as a religious action, greatly favoured by the bloodthirsty goddess they worship. He was in the act of fastening the twisted handkerchief, used for the purpose, round my brother's neck, when Ramoo cut him down. The closest shave, though, was when George, coming down the country, was pounced upon by a tiger and carried off. Ramoo seized a couple of muskets from the men and rushed into the jungle after him, and coming up with the brute killed him at the first shot. George escaped with a broken arm and his back laid open by a scratch of the tiger's claws as it first seized him.

"So at George's death I took Ramoo on, and have found him a most useful fellow. Of course, it was some little time before I became accustomed to his noiseless way of going about, and it used to make me jump when I happened to look round and saw him standing quietly behind me, when I thought I was quite alone. However, as soon as I became accustomed to him, I got over all that, and now I would not lose him for anything; he seems to know instinctively what I want. He is excellent as a waiter and valet; I should feel almost lost without him now, and the clumping about of an English man-servant would annoy me as much as his noiseless way of going about did at first. He has come to speak English very fairly. Of course, my brother always talked to him in his own tongue; still he had picked up enough English for me to get on

with ; now he speaks it quite fluently. When I have nothing whatever for him to do, he devotes himself to my little ward. She is very fond of him, and it is quite pretty to see them together in the garden. Altogether I would not part with him for anything."

* * * * *

John Thorndyke had occasionally made enquiries of Mr. Bastow as to the whereabouts of his son. At the time the sentence was passed transportation to the American colonies was being discontinued, and until other arrangements could be made hulks were established as places of confinement and punishment ; but a few months later he was one of the first batch of convicts sent out to the penal settlement formed on the east coast of Australia. This was intended to be fixed at Botany Bay, but it having been found that this bay was open and unsheltered, it was established at Sydney, although for many years the settlement retained in England the name of the original site. As the condition of the prisoners kept in the hulks was deplorable, the Squire had, through the influence of Sir Charles Harris, obtained the inclusion of Arthur Bastow's name among the first batch of those who were to sail for Australia.

Mr. Bastow obtained permission to see his son before sailing, but returned home much depressed, for he had been assailed with such revolting and blasphemous language by his son, that he had been forced to retire in horror at the end of a few minutes.



CHAPTER V.

SIX years after Arthur Bastow had sailed the Squire learned that there had been a revolt of the convicts ; several had been killed and the mutiny suppressed, but about a dozen had succeeded in getting away. These had committed several robberies and some murders among the settlers, and a military force from the prison were scouring the country for them.

“Of course, Mr. Thorndyke,” the official said, “the Governor in his report does not give us the names of any of those concerned in the matter ; he simply says that the mutiny took place in the quarters occupied by the worse class of prisoners. By worse class, he means the most troublesome and refractory out there. The prisoners are not classified according to their original crimes. A poacher who has killed a game-keeper, or a smuggler who has killed a revenue officer, may in other respects be a quiet and well-conducted man, while men sentenced for comparatively minor offences may give an immense deal of trouble. I will, however, get a letter

written to the Governor asking him if Arthur Bastow was among those who took part in the revolt, and if so, what has become of him."

It was more than a year before the reply came, and then the Governor reported that Arthur Bastow, who was believed to have been the leading spirit of the mutiny, was among those who had escaped, and had not yet been recaptured. It was generally believed that he had been killed by the blacks, but of this there was no actual proof. Mr. Bastow was much disturbed when he heard the news.

A month later the Reigate coach was stopped, when a short distance out of the town, by two highwaymen, and a considerable prize obtained by the robbers. Soon afterwards came news of private carriages being stopped on various commons in the south of London, and of several burglaries taking place among the houses round Clapham, Wandsworth, and Putney. Such events were by no means uncommon, but following each other in such quick succession they created a strong feeling of alarm among the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. John Thorndyke, going up to town shortly afterwards, went to the head-quarters of the Bow Street runners, and had a talk with their chief in reference especially to the stoppage of the Reigate coach. Mr. Chetwynd had lately died, and John Thorndyke had been unanimously elected by his fellow magistrates as chairman of the bench.

"No, Mr. Thorndyke, we have no clue whatever. Our men have been keeping the sharpest watch over the fellows suspected of having a hand in such matters,

but they all seem pretty quiet at present, and none of them seem to be particularly flush with money. It is the same with these burglaries in the south of London. We are at our wits' end about them. We are flooded with letters of complaint from residents, but though the patrols on the commons have been doubled, and every effort made, we are as far off as ever. As far as the burglaries are concerned, we have every reason to think that it is the work of two or three new hands. The jobs are not neatly done, and certainly not with tools usually used by burglars. They seem to rely upon daring rather than skill. Anyhow, we don't know where to look for them, and are altogether at sea."

A month later John Thorndyke had occasion to go up again to town. This time Mark accompanied him. Both carried pistols, as did the groom sitting beside them. The Squire himself was but a poor shot, but Mark had practised a great deal.

Two days after they had reached town the Squire received a letter from Mrs. Cunningham.

"DEAR MR. THORNDYKE,—Knapp has been up this morning to tell me that a stranger dismounted yesterday at the ale-house, and while his horse was being fed, he asked a few questions. Among others, he wished to be told if you were at home, saying that he had known you some fifteen years ago, when you lived near Hastings, and should like to have a talk with you again. In fact, he had turned off from the main road for the purpose. He seemed disappointed when he heard that you had gone up to town, and hearing that you might not

be back for three or four days, said he should be coming back through Reigate in a week or ten days, and he dared say he should be able to find time to call again. Knapp did not hear about it until this morning; he asked the landlord about the man, and the landlord said he was about thirty, dark, and sparely built. He did not notice his horse particularly, seeing that it was such as a small squire or farmer might ride. He carried a brace of pistols in his holsters. The landlord was not prepossessed with his appearance, and it was that that made him speak to Knapp about him. I have told the men to unfasten the dogs every night, and I have asked Knapp to send up two trustworthy men to keep watch."

"It may mean something and it may not," the Squire said, as he handed the letter to Mark; "it is a suspicious-looking circumstance; if the fellow had been honest he would surely have said something about himself. There is no doubt these house-breakers generally find out what chance there is of resistance, and, hearing that we were both away, might have decided on making an attempt. I have pretty well finished our business, and ordered nearly all the provisions that Mrs. Cunningham requires. I have to call at my lawyer's, and that is generally a longish business.

"It is half-past two o'clock; if we start from here at five we shall be down soon after eight, which will be quite soon enough. We shall have a couple of hours' drive in the dark, but that won't matter, we have got the lamps."

"I am quite ready to start, father. I am engaged to

sup with Reginald Ascot, but I will go over this afternoon and make my excuses."

At five o'clock they started.

"You have got your pistols in order, Mark?" the Squire asked, as they drove over London Bridge.

"I have them handy, father, one in each pocket."

"James, are your pistols charged?"

"Yes, sir."

At six o'clock it was beginning to get dusk, and they stopped while the groom got down and lit the lamps; then they resumed their journey. They were within five miles of Reigate when suddenly two horsemen rode out from a side road with a shout of "Stand and deliver!"

The Squire lashed the horses, and a moment later a pistol was fired, and the ball went through John Thorn-dyke's hat. By the light of the lamps Mark saw the other man raise his hand and he fired at once; then, as there was no reply to his fire, he discharged the second barrel at the first who had shot, and who had at once drawn another pistol. The two reports rang out almost at the same moment, but Mark's was a little the first. There was a sharp exclamation of pain from the high-wayman, who wrenched round his horse and galloped down the lane from which he had issued, the groom sending two bullets after him.

"Where is the other man?" Mark exclaimed, as his father reined in the horses.

"Somewhere on the ground there, Mark; I saw him fall from his saddle as we passed him."

"Is it any use pursuing the other, father? I am pretty sure I hit him."

"I am quite sure you did, but it is no good our following; the side roads are so cut up by ruts that we should break a spring before we had gone a hundred yards. No, we will stop and look at this fellow who is unhorsed, Mark."

The groom got down and, taking one of the carriage lamps proceeded to a spot where the highwayman's horse was standing. The man was already dead, the bullet having hit him a few inches above the heart.

"He is dead, father."

"I think you had better lift him up on the foot-board behind; James can ride his horse. We will hand the body over to the constable at Reigate. He may know who he is, or find something upon him that may afford a clue that will lead to the capture of his companion."

"No, I don't know him, Squire," the constable said, as they stopped before his house and told him what had happened. "However, he certainly is dead, and I will get one of the men to help me carry him into the shed behind the court-house. So you say that you think that the other is wounded."

"I am pretty sure he is. I heard him give an exclamation as my son shot."

"That is good shooting, Mr. Mark," the constable said. "If every passenger could use his arms as you do there would soon be an end to stopping coaches. I will see what he has got about him, and will come up and let you know, Squire, the first thing in the morning."

"I will send Knapp down," John Thorndyke said, as they drove homeward. "I am rather curious to know if this fellow is the same as Mrs. Cunningham wrote



“He is dead, father.”

to me about. I will tell him to take Peters along with him."

"I hardly see that there can be any connection between the two. Highwaymen don't go in for house-breaking. I think they consider that to be a lower branch of the profession."

"Generally they do, no doubt, Mark; but you know I told you that the chief at Bow Street said that he had a suspicion that the highway robbers and the house-breakers who have been creating so much alarm, are the same men."

"It is curious that they should have happened to light on us, father, if they were intending to break into our house."

John Thorndyke made no reply, and in a few minutes drove up to the house. Their return, a couple of days before they were expected, caused great satisfaction to Mrs. Cunningham and Millicent. The former, however, had wisely kept from the girl the matter on which she had written to the Squire and the suspicion she had herself entertained.

"I wish you had shot the other man as well as the one you did, Mark," the Squire said, as he walked with his son down to Reigate to attend the inquest the next morning on the man he had brought in.

Mark looked at his father in surprise.

"There is no doubt I hit him, father," he said; "but I should not think that he will be likely to trouble us again."

"I wish I felt quite sure of that. Do you know that I have a strong suspicion that it was Arthur Bastow?"

Mark had, of course, heard of Bastow's escape, but had attached no great importance to it. The crime had taken place nearly eight years before, and although greatly impressed at the time by the ill-doings of the man, the idea that he would ever return and endeavour to avenge himself on his father for the part he had taken had not occurred to him. Beyond mentioning his escape, the Squire had never talked to him on the subject.

"It was he who bade us stand and deliver, and the moment he spoke, the voice seemed familiar to me, and, thinking it over, I have an impression that it was his. I may be mistaken, but I have had him in my mind ever since I heard that he had escaped. I may, therefore, have connected the voice with him erroneously, and yet I cannot but think that I was right. You see, there are two or three suspicious circumstances. In the first place, there was this man down here making enquiries. Knapp went down early this morning with the inn-keeper, and told me before breakfast that Peters at once recognised the fellow you shot as the fellow who had made the enquiries. Now, the natural result of making enquiries would have been that the two men would the next evening have broken into the house, thinking that during our absence they would meet with no resistance. Instead of doing this they waylaid us on the road, which looks as if it was I they intended to attack, and not the house."

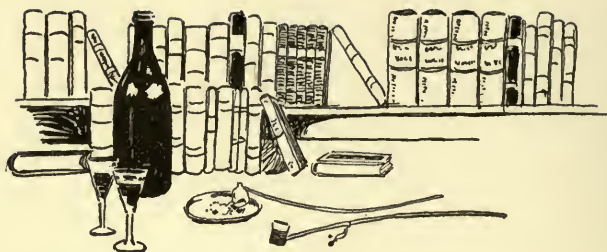
"It is a very unpleasant idea, father."

"Very unpleasant, and it seems to me that we should, at any rate, spare no pains in hunting down the man you wounded."

"I will undertake that if you like. I have nothing particular to do, and it would be an excitement. You have a lot to keep you here."

"I don't fancy that you will find it an excitement, Mark, for of course the detectives will do the hunting, but I should certainly be glad if you would take a letter for me to the head of the detective department, and tell him what I think, and my reasons for thinking so, and say that I offer a reward of £100 for the capture of the man who tried to stop us, and who was, we are certain, wounded by you. Unless he has some marvellously out-of-the-way hiding-place, it ought not to be difficult. A wounded man could scarcely lie hidden in the slums of London without its being known to a good many people, to some of whom a reward of the sum of £100 pounds would be an irresistible temptation."

By this time they had reached Reigate. The inquest did not last many minutes, and the jury without hesitation returned a verdict of justifiable homicide.



CHAPTER VI.

THREE months later John Thorndyke received a letter from the detective office asking him to call the next time he came up to town, as, although no news had been obtained that would lead to the man's immediate arrest, news had, at any rate, been obtained showing that he was alive. It happened that Mark was intending to go up on the following day, and his father asked him to call for him at Bow Street.

"Well, Mr. Thorndyke, we have heard about your man, and that after we had quite abandoned the search. I had come to the conclusion that the wound you gave him had been a fatal one, and that he had been quietly buried by some of the people with whom he was connected. The discovery was, as half these discoveries are generally, the result of accident. Last week a gentleman entered the bank and asked for change in gold for a £50 note. The cashier, looking at the number, found that it was one of those that had been stolen from a passenger by one of the south coaches several months

ago. The gentleman was at once taken into a private office and questioned as to how he had obtained the note. The account that he gave was that he was a surgeon in practice at Southampton. A gentleman had arrived on a date which we found to be the day after that on which you were stopped ; he was well dressed, and had the air of a gentleman ; had come down by coach, and was evidently very ill. He told the surgeon that he had been engaged in a duel, that the pistols had been discharged simultaneously, and that he had killed his man, but had himself been severely wounded. He said that the person whom he had killed had influential connections, and that it would be necessary for him to remain in seclusion for a time, and he asked him to take charge of his case, as he had ample means of paying him handsomely. The surgeon examined the wound, and found it to be, indeed, a serious one, and, as he thought, probably fatal. However, having no doubt as to the truth of the story, he had taken the gentleman in, and he remained under his charge until a week before he came up to town.

“For the first month he had been dangerously ill, but he completely recovered. The surgeon had no reason whatever for doubting his patient being a gentleman ; he was fashionably dressed, and had evidently changed his clothes after the duel, as there were no blood-stains upon them. He was, however, glad when he left, as his conversation did not please him from its cynical tone. The bank at once sent to us as soon as the man presented the note, which, he stated, had been given to him in part payment for his medical services and the board

and lodging of the patient. The total amount had been £75, and the balance was paid in gold. As he was able to give several good references and was identified by three gentlemen, he was of course released. I have no doubt whatever that the fellow was your man. The surgeon said, whoever he was, he must have been a man of iron resolution to have made such a journey in the state he was.

"No doubt he must have ridden straight to the place he used as his head-quarters, where he had his wound roughly bandaged, changed his clothes, and had then ridden the next morning to some point that the coach passed on its way to Southampton. Of course, we obtained from the surgeon a minute description of the man's appearance. We found that the people at the coach office had no remembrance of there being anyone answering to that description among the persons who travelled by the coach, but of course that would not go for much, for over three months have elapsed.

"When the coachman who had driven the down coach that day came up to town, we saw him, and he remembered perfectly that on or about that day he had picked up a passenger at Kingston,—a gentleman who was in very weak health. There were only three inside passengers besides himself, and he had to be assisted into the coach. The way-bill, on being turned up, showed that an inside passenger had been taken up at Kingston. I have already sent down men to make enquiries at every village in the district between Reigate and Kingston, and I trust that we shall lay hands on him, especially now we have got an accurate description

of him, while before we were working in the dark in that respect."

"What is the description, sir? My father is much interested on that point, for, as I believe I told you, he has a strong suspicion that the fellow is the man who was transported more than eight years ago to Australia, and who made his escape from the prison there."

"Yes, I know. At first it appeared to me very improbable, but I am bound to say the description tallies very clearly with that given of him. The surgeon took him to be nearly thirty; but after what he has gone through, he may well look three or four years older than he is. He had light hair, rather small grey eyes, and a face that would have been good-looking had it not been for its supercilious sneering expression."

"I can remember him," Mark said; "and that answers very closely to him. I should say that it is certainly Bastow, and my father made no mistake when he asserted that he recognised his voice."

The officer added a note to the description in his register: "Strongly suspected of being Arthur Bastow, transported for connivance with highwaymen; was leader of a mutiny in convict gaol of Sydney two years and a half ago. Made his escape."

"Altogether a desperate character. No doubt he is the man who has been concerned in most of these robberies in the southern suburbs. We must get hold of him if we can, and once we do so there will be an end of his travels, for a mutiny in prison and escape is a hanging business, putting aside the affairs since he got

back. Well, sir, I hope he will give you and your father no more trouble."

"I am sure I hope so," Mark said. "I suppose that the fellow who was shot was one of the men who escaped with him from the convict prison."

"That is likely enough. Two would get home as easily as one, and the fact that they were both strangers here would account for the difficulty our men have had in their search for him. You see, we have had nothing whatever to go on. You must not be too sanguine about our catching the man in a short time: he is evidently a clever fellow, and I think it likely that once he got back, he lost no time in getting away from this part of the country, and we are more likely to find him in the west or north than we are of laying hands on him here. We will send descriptions all over the country, and as soon as I hear of a series of crimes anywhere, I will send off two of my best men to help the local constables."

"I thought that I could not have been mistaken, Mark; we have got that rascal on our hands again. I hope now that they have got a description of him to go by, they will not be long before they catch him, but the way he escaped after being badly wounded shows that he is full of resources, and he may give them some trouble yet if I am not mistaken. At any rate, I will have a talk with the Reigate constable, and tell him that there is very little doubt that the man who attacked us was Arthur Bastow, who has, as we have heard, escaped from Botany Bay, and that he had best tell his men to keep a sharp lookout for him, for that, owing to his

animosity against us for his former capture and conviction, it is likely enough that sooner or later he will be in this neighbourhood again. After his determined attempt at my life when pretending to rob us, I shall certainly not feel comfortable until I know that he is under lock and key. You were in court when he threatened me after he was sentenced, and I believe thoroughly that the fellow would run any risk to revenge himself on me."

Four days later the party was seated round the fire in the dusk. Mr. Bastow was sitting next to the Squire, and was in unusually good spirits. He had heard no word of what the Squire had discovered, nor dreamt that his son was again in England, still less that one of the men who had endeavoured to stop the Squire and his son on their drive from London was suspected to be his son Arthur. Suddenly there was the crack of a pistol outside and a ball passed between him and the Squire. Without a word, Mark Thorndyke rushed to the door, seized a pistol from his riding-coat, and, snatching up a heavy whip, dashed out into the garden.

He was just in time to see a figure running at full speed, and he set off in pursuit. Good runner as he was, he gained but slightly at first, but after a time he drew nearer to the fugitive. The latter was but some sixty yards away when he leapt a hedge into a narrow lane. Mark followed without hesitation, but as he leapt into the road, he heard a jeering laugh and the sharp sound of a horse's hoofs, and knew that the man he was pursuing had gained his horse and made off. Disgusted at his failure, he went slowly back to the house. The shutters had been put up.

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"I have lost him, father. He ran well to begin with, but I was gaining fast on him when he leapt into a narrow lane where he had left his horse, and rode off before I could get up to him. I need hardly say that there was no use attempting to follow on foot. He missed you all, did he not?"

"Yes, Mark. It is not so easy to take an accurate aim when it is nearly dark. The bullet passed between myself and Mr. Bastow, and has buried itself in the mantel-piece."

"Do you think that he really meant to kill you, father?"

"I should imagine he did; a man would hardly run the risk of being hunted merely for the pleasure of shooting."

"I would give a good deal if I had caught him, or, better still, if I had shot him," said Mark. "However, I will make it my business to hunt the fellow down. After this evening's affair, we shall never feel comfortable until he is caught. I have no doubt that he is the fellow we have been hunting for the last four months; the people at Bow Street seem no good whatever; I will try if I cannot succeed better."

When the ladies went up to bed, the Squire said,—

"Come into the library, Mark, and we will smoke a pipe and have a talk over this business." He touched the bell. "Have you got a good fire in the library, Ramoo?"

"Yes, sahib, very good."

"Then take a bottle of number one bin of port there and a couple of glasses."

When they were quietly seated, glasses filled, and the long pipes alight, the Squire said, "I want to have a serious talk with you, Mark. What I am going to say will surprise you a good deal. I had not intended to tell you for another four years, that is to say, not until Millicent came of age; but after that affair to-night, I feel that my life is so uncertain that I ought not to delay letting you know the truth. I suppose you agree with me that it was Bastow who shot at me this evening?"

"I have not the least doubt about that, father."

"I will not say that he shot at me," the Squire said, "for he may have shot at his father; the villain is quite capable of that. It was his father who brought me upon him, and, though I effected his capture eight years ago, I don't suppose he cared which of us he killed. However, the point is not at which of us he aimed, but whether it was he, and that I take there is no doubt about. He missed me this time, but his next shot may be more successful. At any rate, I think that it is high time that I told you the story."

And beginning with the arrival of Colonel Thorndyke at his place, he repeated the conversation that he had had with him. Several times in the early portion of his narrative he was interrupted by exclamations of surprise from his son.

"Then Millicent is really my uncle's heiress?" exclaimed Mark, when he heard the request the colonel had made of the Squire.

"That is so, Mark. She does not know it herself, and it was my brother's urgent wish that she should not know it until she came of age or until she married.

I fought against it to the utmost, but it was his dying prayer, and I could not refuse it. My solicitor knows the facts of the matter, and so does Mrs. Cunningham, who brought Millicent over from India when she was only about a year old. I may say that I especially urged that it would not be fair to you to be brought up to consider yourself to be heir to the property, but he said,—

“‘Putting aside the estate, I have a considerable fortune. In the first place there are the accumulations of rent from the Reigate place. I have never touched them, and they have been going on for twelve years. In the next place, the shaking of the Pagoda tree has gone on merrily, and we all made a comfortable pile. Then I always made a point of carrying about with me £200 or £300, and after the sacking of some of the palaces, I could pick up jewels and things from the troops for a trifle, being able to pay money down. Even without the rents here, I have some £50,000 in money. I should think the jewels would be worth at least £25,000 more, irrespective of a diamond bracelet, which is, I fancy, worth more than the rest put together. It was stolen from the arm of some idol.’ He then explained how he got it, and the manner in which he had placed it and the rest of his wealth, in a secure position.

“‘Those things stolen from a god are frightfully dangerous,’ he said, ‘for the Brahmins or priests connected with the temples have been known to follow them up for years, and in nine cases out of ten they get possession of them again. Murder in such a case is meritorious, and I would not have them in the house

here were they ten times the value they are. I know that my clothes, my drawers, and everything belonging to me has been gone through at night a score of times. Nothing has been stolen, but, being a methodical man, I could generally see some displacement in the things that told me they had been disturbed. They gave it up for a time, but I haven't a shadow of doubt that they have been watching me ever since, and they may be watching me now for anything I know. Now, half of that fortune I have left, by my will, to your son; half to the girl. I will tell you where the things are, the last thing.

“‘Now, mind, you must be careful when you get them. When I am dead you are almost certain to be watched. You don't know what these fellows are. The things must remain where they are until your boy comes of age. Don't let him keep those diamonds an hour in his possession; let him pass them away privately to some man in whom he has implicit confidence, for him to take them to a jeweller's; let him double and turn and disguise himself so as to throw everyone that may be spying on him off his track. If you can manage it, the best way would be to carry them over to Amsterdam, and sell them there.’

“I confess it seemed absurd, but it is a matter about which he would know a great deal more than I do, and he was convinced that not only was he watched, but that he owed his life simply to the fact that the fellows did not know where the diamonds were hidden, and that by killing him they would have lost every chance of regaining them.

“So convinced was he of all this, that he would not tell me where he had stowed them away ; he seemed to think that the very walls would hear us, and that these fellows might be hidden under the sofa, in a cupboard, or up the chimney, for aught I know. He told me that he would tell me the secret before he died ; but death came so suddenly that he never had an opportunity of doing so. He made a tremendous effort in his last moment, but failed, and I shall never forget the anguish his face expressed when he found himself powerless to speak ; however, he pressed his snuff box into my hand with such a significant look that, being certain that it contained some clue to the mystery, and being unable to find a hidden spring or a receptacle, I broke it open that night.

“It contained a false bottom, and here are what I found in it. I stowed them away in a secret drawer in that old cabinet that stands by my bedside. It is in the bottom pigeon-hole on the right-hand side. I bought the cabinet at a sale, and found the spring of the secret drawer quite accidentally. I shall put the things back to-night, and you will know where to look for them. You press on the bottom and up against the top simultaneously, and the back then falls forward. The opening behind is very shallow, and will hold but two or three letters. But, however, it sufficed for this.” And he handed Mark the coin and slip of paper.

“But what are these, father?”

“These are the clues by which we are to obtain the treasure.”

As Mark examined them carefully, the Squire stood

up with his back to the fire, and, looking round, walked to the door, and said,—

“I thought there was a draught somewhere ; either Ramoo did not shut the door when he went out, or it has come open again. It has done that once or twice before. When I go into the town to-morrow I will tell Tucker to send a man up to take the lock off. Well, what do you make out of that?”

“I can make out nothing,” Mark replied. “No doubt the coin is something to be given to whoever is in charge of the treasure, and Masulipatam may be the place where it is hidden.”

“Yes, or it may be a password. It reminds one of the forty thieves business. You go and knock at the door of a cave, a figure armed to the teeth presents itself ; you whisper in his ear ‘Masulipatam ;’ he replies ‘Madras’ or ‘Calcutta,’ or something of that sort ; you take out the coin and show it to him ; he takes out from some hidden repository another similar to it ; he compares the two, and then leads you to an inner cave piled up with jewels.”

Mark laughed.

“Well, it is no laughing matter, Mark,” the Squire went on, seriously. “The little comedy may not be played just as I have sketched it, but I expect that it is something of the kind. That coin has to be shown, and the word ‘Masulipatam’ spoken to the guardian, whoever he may be, of your uncle’s treasure. But who that guardian may be or how he is to be found is a mystery. I myself have never tried to solve it. There was nothing whatever to go upon. The thing may be in England

or it may be anywhere in India. To me it looked an absolutely hopeless business to set about. I did not see how even a first step was to be taken, and as I had this estate and you and Millicent to look after, and was no longer a young man, I put the matter aside altogether. You are young, you have plenty of energy, and you have your life before you, and it is a matter of the greatest interest to you.

"Possibly, very improbably, mind, still possibly, when Millicent comes of age and learns who she is, Mrs. Cunningham may be able to help you. I have no idea whether it is so. I have never spoken to her about this treasure of George's, but it is just possible that while he was in town before he came down to me he may have given her some instructions concerning it. Of course he intended to give me full particulars, but he could hardly have avoided seeing that in the event of my death, perhaps suddenly, before the time for seeking the treasure, the secret would be lost altogether. Whether he has told her or his lawyer or not I cannot say, but I have all along clung to the hope that he took some such natural precaution. Unless that treasure is discovered, the only thing that will come to you is the half of the rents of this estate during the ten years between my father's death and George's; the rents were paid to our solicitors, and by them invested."

"I am sure I have no reason to grumble, father," Mark said, heartily; "of course it came upon me at first as a surprise that Millicent was the heiress here, and it flashed through my mind for the moment that the best thing would be to take a commission in the army,

or to follow my uncle's example, and get a cadetship in the Company's service. I have no doubt that I should have enjoyed life either way quite as much or possibly more than if I had gone on a good many years as heir to these estates, and afterwards as Squire. Of course, now I shall see if it is possible to obtain some sort of clue to this treasure, and then follow it up ; but the first thing to which I shall give my mind will be to hunt down Bastow. We shall never feel safe here as long as that fellow is alive, and that will be the first thing I shall devote myself to. After that I shall see about the treasure."

"As to that, Mark, I cannot impress upon you too strongly what your uncle said. It may, of course, be a pure delusion on his part. As to that I cannot say, but if he is right, and some of these Hindoo fellows are still on the watch to obtain that bracelet, you must use extraordinary precautions when you get it into your hands ; he advised me to take it across to Amsterdam and either get the stones recut or to sell them separately to different diamond merchants there. He said that my life would not be worth an hour's purchase as long as the stones were in my hands."

Suddenly Mark sprang to his feet and pulled back the curtains across a window, threw it up and leapt into the garden, and there stood listening for two or three minutes, with his pistol cocked in his hand. He stepped for a moment into the room again.

"You had better put that light out, father, or we may have another shot."

"Did you hear anything, Mark?"

"I thought I did, father ; I may have been mistaken, but I certainly thought I heard a noise, and when I pulled the curtains aside the window was not shut by three or four inches. I will have a look through the shrubbery, that fellow may have come back again. Pull the curtains to after me."

"I will go with you, Mark."

"I would rather you didn't, father ; it would only make me nervous. I shan't go into the shrubbery and give them a chance of getting first shot. I shall hide up somewhere and listen. It is a still night, and if there is anyone moving I am pretty sure to hear him."

The Squire turned down the lamp, drew the curtains, and seated himself by the fire. It was three-quarters of an hour before Mark returned. He shut the window and fastened it carefully.

"I fancy you must have been mistaken, Mark."

"I suppose that shot through the window has made me nervous. I certainly did fancy I heard a noise there ; it may have been a dead bough snapping, or something of that sort ; and, of course, the window being partly open, even though only three or four inches, any little noise would come in more plainly than it otherwise would. However, everything has been perfectly quiet since I went out, and it is hardly likely, indeed, that the fellow would have returned so soon after the hot chase I gave him."



CHAPTER VII.

IT was some hours before Mark went to sleep. The news that he had heard that evening was strange and startling. Full of health and strength, the fact that he was not, as he had always supposed, the heir to the estate, troubled him not at all. The fact that in four years he would come in for some £12,000 was sufficient to prevent his feeling any uneasiness as to his future ; and, indeed, in some respects, it was not an unpleasant idea that, instead of being tied down to the estate, he should be able to wander at will, visit foreign countries, and make his own life.

In one respect he was sorry his father had in the last year hinted more than once that it would be a very nice arrangement if he were to make up a match with his ward : he had laughed and said that there would be plenty of time for that yet. But the idea had been an agreeable one. He was very fond of Millicent—fond, perhaps, in a cousinly way, at present ; but, at any rate, he liked her far better than any of the sisters of his

friends. Of course, she was only seventeen yet, and there was plenty of time to think of marriage in another three years. Still the thought occurred to him several times that she was budding out into a young woman, and every month added to her attractions. It was but the day before he had said to himself that there was no reason to wait as long as three years, especially as his father seemed anxious and much disposed towards the match. Now, of course, he said to himself, that was at an end.

He had never acted in any way as a lover before, and now that she was the heiress and he comparatively poor, she would consider it was his desire for the estate and not for her that induced his wooing. Then there was the question of this curiously lost treasure, with the mysterious clue that led to nothing. How on earth was he to set about the quest? He puzzled for a long time over this till at last he fell asleep. He was roused by Ramoo entering the room.

"What is it, Ramoo?"

"Me not know, sahib. Massa Thorndyke's door shut. Me no able to make him hear."

"That is curious, Ramoo," Mark said, jumping hastily out of bed. "I will be with you in a minute." He slipped on his trousers, coat, and slippers, and then accompanied Ramoo to his father's door. He knocked again and again, and each time more loudly, his face growing paler as he did so. Then he threw himself against the door, but it was solid and heavy.

"Fetch me an axe, Ramoo," he said. "There is something wrong here."

Ramoo returned in a short time with two men-servants and with the axe in his hands. Mark took it, and with a few mighty blows split the wood-work, and then, hurling himself against the door, it yielded. As he entered the room a cry broke from his lips. Within a pace or two of the bed the Squire lay on the ground, on his face, and a deep stain on the carpet at once showed that his death had been a violent one. Mark knelt by his side now, and touched him. The body was stiff and cold. The Squire must have been dead for some hours.

"Murdered !" he said, in a low voice ; " my father has been murdered." He remained in horror-struck silence for a minute or two, then he slowly rose to his feet.

"Let us lay him on the bed," he said, and with the assistance of the three men he lifted and laid him there.

"He has been stabbed," he murmured, pointing to a small cut in the middle of the deep stain, just over the heart.

Ramoo, after helping to lift the Squire on to the bed, had slid down to the floor and crouched there, sobbing convulsively. The two servants stood helpless and aghast. Mark looked round the room : the window was open. He walked to it. A garden ladder stood outside, showing how the assassin had obtained entrance. Mark stood rigid and silent, his hands tightly clenched, his breath coming slowly and heavily. At last he roused himself.

"Leave things just as they are," he said to the men in a tone of unnatural calmness, "and fasten the door up again and turn a table or something of that sort

against it from the outside, so that no one can come in. John, do you tell one of the grooms to saddle a horse and ride down into the town. Let him tell the head constable to come up at once, and also Dr. Holloway. Then he is to go on to Sir Charles Harris, tell him what has happened, and beg him to ride over at once. Come, Ramoo," he said, in a softer voice, "you can do no good here, poor fellow, and the room must be closed. It is a heavy loss to you, too."

The Hindoo rose slowly, the tears streaming down his face.

"He was a good master," he said, "and I loved him just as I loved the colonel, sahib. Ramoo would have given his life for him."

With his hand upon Ramoo's shoulder, Mark left the room ; he passed a group of women huddled together with blanched faces, at a short distance down the passage, the news that the Squire's door could not be opened and the sounds made by its being broken in having called them together. Mark could not speak. He silently shook his head and passed on. As he reached his room he heard shrieks and cries behind him as the men informed them of what had taken place. On reaching his door, the one opposite opened, and Mrs. Cunningham in a dressing-gown came out.

"What is the matter, Mark, and what are these cries about?"

"A dreadful thing has happened, Mrs. Cunningham ; my father has been murdered in the night. Please tell Millicent."

Then he closed the door behind him, threw himself

on his bed, and burst into a passion of tears. The Squire had been a good father to him, and had made him his friend and companion, a treatment rare, indeed, at a time when few sons would think of sitting down in their father's presence until told to do so. Since he had left school eight years before, they had been very much together. For the last two or three years Mark had been a good deal out with his own friends, but in this his father had encouraged him.

"I like to see you make your own friends, Mark, and go your own way," he used to say; "it is as bad for a lad to be tied to his father's coat-tail as to his mother's apron-string. You get fresh ideas and form your own opinions. It will do for you what a public school would have done,—make you self-reliant and independent."

Still, of course, a great portion of his time had been spent with his father, and they would ride round the estate together, talk to the tenants, and walk in the gardens and forcing-houses. Generally Mark would be driven by his father to the meet if it took place at any distance, and send on his horse beforehand by a groom, while of an evening they would sit in the library, smoke their long pipes, and talk over politics or the American and French wars.

All this was over. There was but one thing now that he could do for his father, and that was revenge his death, and at the thought he rose from his bed impatiently and paced up and down the room. He must wait for a week, wait till the funeral was over, and then he would be on Bastow's track. If in all other ways he failed, he would spend his time in coaches until at last

the villain should try to stop one ; but there must be other ways. Could he find no other, he would apply for employment as a Bow Street runner, serve for a year to find out their methods, and acquaint himself with the places where criminals were harboured. It would be the one object of his life, until he succeeded in laying his hand on Bastow's shoulder. He would not shoot him if he could help it. He should prefer to see him in the dock and to hear the sentence passed on him and to see it carried out. As to the treasure, it was not worth a thought till his first duty was discharged.

Presently a servant brought him a cup of tea. He drank it mechanically and then proceeded to dress himself. Sir Charles Harris would be here soon and the others ; indeed, he had scarcely finished when he was told that the doctor from Reigate had just arrived, and that the constable had come up half an hour before. He at once went down to the library into which the doctor had been shown.

"You have heard what has happened," he said, as he shook hands silently. "I expect Sir Charles Harris here in half an hour. I suppose you will not go up till then."

"No, I think it will be best that no one should go in until he comes. I have been speaking to Simcox ; he was going in, but I told him I thought it was better to wait. I may as well take the opportunity of going upstairs to see Mr. Bastow. I hear that he fainted when he heard the news, and that he is completely prostrate."

"Two such shocks might well prove fatal to him," Mark said ; "he has been weak and ailing for some time."

"Two shocks?" the doctor repeated, interrogatively.

"Ah! I forgot you had not heard about the affair yesterday evening: a man fired at us through the window when we were sitting round the fire, before the candles were lit. The ball passed between my father's head and Mr. Bastow's; each had a narrow escape; the bullet is embedded in the mantel-piece."

"I will have it cut out; it may be a useful item of evidence some day. But what could have been the man's motive? Your father was universally popular."

"Except with ill-doers," Mark said. "I ran out and chased the fellow for half a mile, and should have caught him if he had not had a horse waiting for him in a lane, and he got off by the skin of his teeth. I hope that next time I meet him he will not be so lucky. Mr. Bastow was very much shaken, and went to bed soon afterwards. I am not surprised that this second shock should be too much for him. Will you go up and see him? I will speak to Simcox."

The constable was out in the garden.

"This is a terrible business, Mr. Thorndyke. I suppose, after what you told me, you have your suspicions?"

"They are not suspicions at all, they are certainties. Did you hear that he tried to shoot my father yesterday evening?"

"No, sir, I have heard nothing about it."

Mark repeated the story of the attempt and pursuit.

"Could you swear to him, Mr. Thorndyke?"

"No; there was not much light left; besides, as I had not seen him for the last eight years, I should certainly

not be able to recognise him unless I had time to have a good look at him ; had it only been last night's affair it might have been anyone ; but the shooting through the window was not the act of a thief, but of an assassin, who could only have been influenced by private enmity. I quite see that at present I have no legal evidence against him ; I cannot even prove that he is in the country, for it cannot be said that my father's belief that he recognised the voice of the man who said, 'Stand and deliver !' is proof. No jury would convict on that, even had he felt absolutely certain, which he was not. I doubt if anyone could swear that, when he only heard three words, he was absolutely sure that it was the voice of a man that he had not seen for some years. However, fortunately, that will make no difference ; the man is wanted for his heading a mutiny in the convict prison at Sydney, killing several warders, and making his escape, which will be quite sufficient to hang him without this business. But I own that I should prefer that he were hanged for my father's murder if we could secure sufficient evidence. Moreover, there is the attack upon us three or four months ago, and, with the evidence of the surgeon who attended him, as to his wound, that would be enough to hang him. But we have first got to catch him, and that I mean to make my business, however long the search may take me."

"Was anything taken last night, sir?"

"I don't know. I did not look. We shall see to that when we go upstairs. We may as well go indoors now ; Sir Charles may be here in a few minutes, and I want to hear Dr. Holloway's report as to Mr. Bastow."

"He does not suspect, I hope, sir?"

"No, thank God! my father never mentioned anything he heard about his son to him, or his suspicions; therefore, he has no reason to believe that his son is not still in the convict prison at Sydney. We shall keep it from him now, whatever happens; but it would, for his sake, be best that this shock should prove too much for him. He has had a very hard time of it altogether."

"He is terribly prostrate," the doctor reported, when Mark joined him. "I don't think that he will get over it. He is scarcely conscious now. You see, he is an old man, and has no reserve of strength to fall back upon. Your father has been such a good friend to him that it is not surprising that the news should have been too much for him. I examined him at the Squire's request some month's ago as to his heart's action, which was so weak that I told the Squire then that he might go off at any time, and I rather wonder that he recovered even temporarily from the shock."

In a few minutes Sir Charles Harris drove up.

"This is terrible news, my dear Mark," he said, as he leapt from his gig, and wrung Mark's hand; "terrible! I don't know when I have had such a shock; he was a noble fellow in all respects, a warm friend, an excellent magistrate, a kind landlord, good all round. I can scarcely believe it yet. A burglar, of course. I suppose he entered the house for the purpose of robbery, when your father awoke and jumped out of bed, there was a tussle, and the scoundrel killed him; at least, that is what I gather from the story that the groom told me."

An examination of the room showed nothing whatever that would afford the slightest clue ; the Squire's watch was still in the watch-pocket at the head of the bed, his purse was on a small table beside him ; apparently nothing had been touched in the room.

The gardener, on being called in, said that the ladder was always hung up outside the shed at the back of the house ; there was a chain round it, and he had found that morning that one of the links had been filed through.

"I expect the fellow was prowling about here for some time," Mark said. "I was chatting with my father in the library when I thought I heard a noise, and I threw open the window, which had by some carelessness been left a little open, and went out, and listened for nearly an hour, but I could hear nothing, and put it down to the fact that I was nervous owing to what had happened early in the evening, and that the noise was simply fancy, or that the frost had caused a dry branch of one of the shrubs to crack."



CHAPTER VIII.

THE inquest occupied a very short time, the only point on which many questions were asked being as to the firing through the window. Mark stated that it was already so dark that, although he was within fifty yards of the man when he mounted and rode off, he could not give any very distinct description of his figure. It struck him as being that of a man of medium height.

"You have made out that the bullet was intended for your father?"

"I cannot say that, sir ; it went between his head and that of Mr. Bastow, and it might have been meant for either."

"Was your father impressed with the idea that it was an attempt to murder him?"

"He naturally thought so. Mr. Bastow can assuredly have no enemies, while my father, as a magistrate, may have made some. He certainly thought it was an attempt to murder him, and was so impressed by the fact

that when he went to the library later on he went into certain family matters with me that he had never communicated before, and which, had it not been for this, he would not have entered into for some years to come."

"He had his opinion then as to who was his assailant?"

"He had, sir ; but as it was but an opinion, although there were several facts that seemed to justify the conviction, there was no proof whatever, and therefore I do not think myself justified in saying what that opinion was."

"Do you entertain the same opinion yourself?"

"I do," Mark said, emphatically ; "but until I can obtain some evidence in support of what is really but a matter of opinion, and because were I to give the name it would lessen my chance of obtaining such evidence, I decline to mention the name."

"You have no doubt that the author of the second attempt is the same as that of the first?"

"Personally, I have no doubt whatever ; it stands to reason that it is barely possible that two men could have, unknown to each other, made up their minds to murder my father on the same evening."

The constable's evidence added nothing to that given by Mark. He had been down to the lane where the man pursued had mounted. The reins of the horse had apparently been thrown over a gate-post, and he thought it had been standing there for some little time, for there were marks where it had scraped the ground repeatedly ; he had followed the marks of its hoofs for some distance ; it had gone at a gallop for about half a mile, and then the pace had slackened into a trot. It continued until

the lane fell into the main road, but beyond this he had been unable to distinguish it from the marks of the traffic in general.

"You found no footprints whatever near the foot of the ladder or anywhere else round the house?"

"None whatever, sir."

"There were no signs of any other window or door save that of Mr. Thorndyke's room being attempted?"

"None at all, sir."

There was but a short consultation between the jurors, who at once returned a verdict of "Wilful murder by some person or persons unknown."

Dr. Holloway had, after giving evidence, returned at once to Mr. Bastow's room. The only point of importance in his evidence was the statement that the wound must have been fatal at once, the heart itself having been penetrated. It had been inflicted by a dagger or a narrow-bladed knife.

"Do you mean that it was an unusually small dagger, Dr. Holloway?"

"I should say it was a very fine dagger; not the sort of weapon that you would expect to find a highwayman carry, if he carried one at all, but rather a weapon of Spanish or Italian manufacture."

"Not the sort of wound that a rapier would make?"

"Yes, the wound itself might have been very well made by a light rapier, but there was a slight bruise on the flesh on each side of the wound, such a mark as might be made by the handle or guard of a dagger and sufficiently plain to leave no doubt in my mind that it was so made."

"Had the wound a downward course, or was it a straight thrust?"

"A straight thrust," the doctor replied; "my idea is that the two men were grappling together, and that as Mr. Thorndyke was a very powerful man, his assailant, who probably was approaching the bed with the dagger in his hand, plunged it into him; had he struck at him I should certainly have expected the course of the wound to be downward, as I fancy a man very seldom thrusts straight with a dagger, as he would do with a rapier."

When the inquest was over, Mark, going out into the hall, found the doctor waiting there for him.

"Mr. Bastow breathed his last some ten minutes ago. I saw when I went up to him just before I gave my evidence that it was likely that he would die before I returned to the room."

"I am very sorry," Mark said, "although I expected nothing else from what you told me. He was a very kind-hearted man; no one could have had a kinder or more patient tutor than he was to me, while my father regarded him as a very dear and valued friend. I am expecting the undertaker here in a few minutes, and they can both be buried at the same time."

It was late in the afternoon before Millicent came down with Mrs. Cunningham. The news of Mr. Bastow's death had set her tears flowing afresh; she had been very fond of him, and that he and the Squire should have been taken at once seemed almost beyond belief. She had, however, nerved herself to some degree of composure before she went down to meet

Mark, but although she returned the pressure of his hand, she was unable for some time to speak. Mrs. Cunningham thought it best to speak first of the minor grief.

"So Mr. Bastow has gone, Mark?"

"Yes; Dr. Holloway thought very badly of him from the first, and said that he had but very faint hope of his rallying. I cannot help thinking that it was best so. Of course, he was not a very old man, but he has for some years been a very feeble one, and now that Millicent and I have both given up our studies with him, I think that he would have felt that his work was done, and would have gone down hill very fast."

"I think so, too," Mrs. Cunningham agreed. "I am sure that even had the Squire's death come quietly, in the course of nature, it would have been a terrible blow to him. He was fond of you and Millicent, but his affection for your father was a passion, his face always lit up when he spoke to him. I used to think sometimes that it was like an old dog with his master. It was quite touching to see them together. I think, Mark, with you, that it is best that it should be as it is."

Gradually the conversation turned to other matters. Millicent was, however, unable to take any part in it, and half an hour later she held out her hand silently to Mark and left the room hurriedly. The next day she was better, and was able to walk for a time with Mark in the garden and talk more calmly about their mutual loss, for to her, no less than to Mark, the Squire had been a father.

"'Tis strange to think that you are the Squire now, Mark," she said, as they sat together in the dining-room on the evening before the funeral.

"You will think it stranger still, Millicent," he said, "when I tell you that I am not the Squire, and never shall be."

She looked up in his face with wonder.

"What do you mean, Mark?"

"Well, dear, you will know to-morrow, as Mr. Prendergast, one of the family solicitors, is coming down, but I think it is as well to tell you beforehand. It has been a curious position all along. I never knew it myself till my father told me when we went into the library after the shot was fired. The news did not affect me one way or the other, although it surprised me a great deal. Like yourself, I have always supposed that you were my father's ward, the daughter of an old comrade of his brother's. Well, it is a curious story, Millicent. But there is no occasion for you to look frightened. The fact is, you are my uncle's daughter and my cousin."

"Oh, that is not very dreadful!" she exclaimed, in a tone of relief.

"Not dreadful at all," Mark said. "But you see it involves the fact that you are the owner of this estate, and not I."

Millicent stood up suddenly, with a little cry.

"No, no, Mark, it cannot be. It would be dreadful, and I won't have it. Nothing could make me have it. What, to take the estate away from you, when you have all along supposed it to be yours! How could I?"

"But you see it never has been mine, my dear.

Father might have lived another five-and-twenty years, and God knows I have never looked forward to succeeding him. Sit down and let me tell you the story. It was not my father's fault that he reigned here so long as master. It was the result of a whim of your father's. And although my father fought against it, he could not resist the dying prayer of my uncle."

He then related the whole circumstances under which the girl had been brought up as Millicent Conyers, instead of Millicent Conyers Thorndyke, and how the estate had been left by Colonel Thorndyke's will to his brother, until such time as Millicent should come of age, or marry, and how he had ordered that when that event took place, the rest of his property in money and jewels was to be divided equally between Mark and herself.

"Mrs. Cunningham has known this all along, Mark?"

"Yes, of course. She brought you from India, you see, and has known all along that the colonel was your father. She knows it, and the family solicitors know it, but I believe no one else, except, perhaps, Ramoo. I am not sure whether he was in uncle's service when you were sent over in Mrs. Cunningham's charge. He may know it or he may not, but certainly no one else does, except, as I say, the solicitors and myself. Possibly some other of the colonel's old comrades knew that there was a child born, but if they were in England and happened to hear that my father had succeeded to the estate, they would, of course, suppose that the child had died."

"Then," Millicent said, in a tone of relief, "there can be no reason why anyone else should know anything

about it. I will see Mr. Prendergast when he comes down to-morrow, and beg him to say nothing about it. £15,000 is quite enough for any girl, and, besides, you say that my father's greatest wish was that I was not to be married for money, and after all the pains that have been taken, his wish will not be carried out if I am to be made owner of the estate."

"You won't be able to persuade Mr. Prendergast to do that," Mark said, smiling. "It is his duty simply to carry out the provisions of your father's will, and to place you in possession of the estate, and if he would keep silence, which he certainly won't, you don't suppose that I would."

"Then I shall hate you, Mark."

"I don't think you will, Millicent, and I would rather that you did that than that you should despise me ; at the present moment you may think that this estate would be only a burden to you, but some day when you marry you might see the matter in a different light."

The girl looked at him reproachfully.

At this moment, Mrs. Cunningham coming into the room, Millicent ran to her and threw her arms round her neck.

"He has made me miserable," she said. "I thought I could not have been more miserable than I was before he told me all about it."

"I knew that he was going to do so, and I was quite sure that you would not be pleased at the news. I have all along thought that it was a mistake on the part of your father ; but as it was his decision, and not mine, I only had to carry out his wishes."

"It is cruel," Millicent sobbed. "I don't mean it is cruel of my father ; of course, he could not have known, and he thought he was doing the best thing for my happiness, but it has all turned out wrong."

"For the present you may think so, dear ; but you must remember that up to the present time it has turned out well. I know that your uncle did not like it at first, but I think that he passed ten happy years here. It gave him great power for doing good, and he worthily availed himself of it. We have all spent a happy time ; he was universally liked and respected. I think all of us have benefited by it. It would not have been half so pleasant if it had been known that you, my child, were the real owner of the estate, and he was acting merely as your guardian ; let us hope that everything will turn out as well in future. Colonel Thorndyke told me that he had left a considerable sum in addition to the estates, and that this was to be divided between you and Mark ; so you see your cousin will not go out into the world a beggar."

"It is most of it lost," Millicent said, with an hysterical laugh. "It is all hidden away, and no one can find it ; everything has gone wrong together."

"Well, I think, dear, that you had better go up to bed. I will go with you ; at the present time this, of course, has come upon you as an additional shock. I would gladly have shielded you from it for a time if I could have done so, but you must have learned it to-morrow, and I quite agreed with Mark that it was better that he should tell you this evening. I sent down to the town to-day to the doctor's, and asked him to send

me up a soothing draught, thinking, that you might be upset by the news. I hope by the morning you will be able to look at matters more calmly."

The next morning Mr. Prendergast, who had arrived at Reigate late the evening before, and had put up at an inn, came up to the house an hour before the time named for the funeral. He learnt from Mark that he had already acquainted Millicent with her change of circumstances. A few minutes after he arrived, a servant told him that Miss Conyers would be glad if he would see her alone for a few minutes in the drawing-room. Mark had already prepared him for her request.

"Mark has told you what he told me last night, I suppose, Mr. Prendergast?"

"He has," the old lawyer said, kindly, "and he tells me also that you are not at all pleased at the news."

"Pleased! I should think not, Mr. Prendergast," she said, indignantly. "I am unwilling to rob my cousin of what he has always been taught to regard as his inheritance. It is abominable, I call it, and most unnatural."

"But, my dear young lady, it is yours and not his. I do not wish to discuss whether the arrangement was altogether a wise one, but I think that so far it has turned out well for all parties. Your estate has profited greatly by the management of your uncle, the tenants and all connected with it have benefited greatly, he himself has had active employment afforded him, of which he was fond. Your cousin has, I believe, enjoyed the advantages of the position, and has become acquainted

with the best people in this part of the country, and will now obtain the benefit of something like £15,000 ; a comfortable little sum, especially as he inherits, I believe, his father's property in Sussex. You yourself will have obtained what I cannot but consider the advantage of having been brought up without knowing that you were an heiress, and therefore without being spoiled, which is, in my opinion, the case with many young ladies in such a condition ; therefore, I cannot but think that if unwise in its conception, the matter has so far worked out well. I am bound to say that Mr. Mark Thorndyke has been speaking to me very handsomely on the subject, and that he appears in no way disappointed at finding that you are the heiress of the estate, and is really concerned only at your unwillingness to accept the situation."

"I wanted to know, Mr. Prendergast," she said, but in a tone that showed she was convinced by his manner that her request would be refused, "if you could arrange so that things would not be disturbed, and he should come into possession as his father's heir in the natural way."

"But you see, he is not his father's heir, Miss Thorn-dyke. His father only had the use, as we call it, of the property until you came of age, or married ; it was not necessary for it to come to you on your coming of age, but only, as your father explained to me, in the event of your marriage ; that is to say, it was not to become public that you were entitled to the estate until your marriage. If you married before you were twenty-one, the property was then to come to you. If you did not,

you were to be informed of the circumstances or not, as Mr. Thorndyke might decide was best, but you were not to come into the property until you married. Your cousin was also to be informed when you came to the age of twenty-one, and as at that time he was to take his half-share of the remainder of the property, he would then be able to arrange his life as he liked. If your uncle died, as unfortunately he has done, before you reached the age of twenty-one, you would then be placed in your proper position ; but your father desired us to say to you that it was his wish that, if it could be arranged, your having succeeded to the ownership should not be publicly known until you divulged it to your husband after marriage. The other portions of the will must be carried out. This being only a request, you are at liberty to follow it or not, as you may choose."

"Certainly I should choose," the girl said. "After all this trouble to prevent my being run after as an heiress, it would be wicked on my part to upset and to fly in the face of his wishes by setting up as mistress of this estate. Still, you understand, Mr. Prendergast, that I don't mean to take it."

The lawyer smiled indulgently.

"There is one way in which it might be managed," he said. "Perhaps you can guess what it is?"

A flush of colour rose over the girl's face.

"Don't say it, Mr. Prendergast. Mrs. Cunningham hinted at it this morning, and I told her that my own wish entirely agreed with that of my father, and that I was determined not to be married for money ; and I am quite sure that Mark would be as unwilling as I am that

the estate should change hands in that way. No, Mr. Prendergast, you must find some other way of doing it than that. Surely an estate cannot be forced upon any one who is determined not to take it."

"Well, we must think it over," Mr. Prendergast said, quietly. "And now I think that it is time for me to join the others."



CHAPTER IX.

THE funeral of Squire Thorndyke and Mr. Bastow was over, and all agreed they had never seen a more affecting spectacle than that at the church-yard when the two coffins were brought in. The distance was short, and the tenants had requested leave to carry the Squire's bier, while that of Mr. Bastow was borne by the villagers who had known and loved him. Behind followed all the magistrates and a great number of the gentry for miles round ; the church-yard was crowded by every man, woman, and child in the village, and the women as well as many of the men wept unrestrainedly as the coffins passed by. Besides these, a large number of gentlemen from Reigate and the surrounding villages were present, attracted rather by the crime that had caused the death than by the death of the Squire himself. The church was crowded, and it was with difficulty that Mr. Greg read the service. The Squire was laid by the side of his father, Mr. Bastow in the spot where many of his predecessors slept before him.

Mark had been greatly affected, not only by his own loss, but by the sight of the general grief among those for whom the Squire had done so much ; even Mr. Prendergast, who had taken part in many such functions over departed clients, was much moved by the scene.

“I have been at many funerals,” he said to Mark, as they walked back to the Hall, “but I never have been at one that so affected me. No monument ever raised, sir, did such credit to him that was laid beneath as the tears of those simple villagers.”

Mark did not reply ; his heart was altogether too full to speak. As they entered the house he said, “The ladies will have their lunch upstairs, Mr. Prendergast ; we may as well have ours at once, and then you can call them down if there is any business to be done.”

“That will not take long,” the lawyer said. “I have brought down the wills of both your uncle the colonel, and your father ; the former has never been read, and I think that it would be as well for me to read them both. That of your father is a very short and simple document, extending, indeed, only over a few lines. Your uncle’s is longer and more complicated, but as you are well aware of the gist of it, it will take us but a short time to get through it.”

Mark took his meal in a perfunctory manner. For himself he would have eaten nothing, but he made an effort to do so in order to keep his guest company. When it was over he said,—

“We may as well go into the library at once, and I

will send up for the ladies. It is as well to lose no time, for I know that you want to catch the afternoon coach up to town."

Mrs. Cunningham and Millicent joined them in a minute or two, the girl looking very pale in her deep mourning.

"I am about," Mr. Prendergast said, quietly, "to read the wills of Colonel Thorndyke and Mr. John Thorndyke, and I will ask you, if there is any phrase that you do not understand, to stop me, and I will explain to you its purport."

The three persons present were acquainted with the main provisions of the colonel's will. It began by stating that, being determined that his daughter Millicent Conyers Thorndyke, should not be married for her money, he hereby bequeathed to his brother, John Thorndyke, his estate in the parish of Crowswood, to be held by him until his daughter Millicent came to the age of twenty-one, or was married; if that marriage did not take place until she was over the age of twenty-one, so long was it to continue in John Thorndyke's possession, save and except that she was, on attaining the age of twenty-one, to receive from it an income of £250 a year for her private use and disposal.

"To Jane Cunningham, the widow of the late Captain Charles Cunningham, of the Tenth Madras Native Infantry, should she remain with my daughter until the marriage of the latter, I bequeath an annuity of £150 per annum, chargeable on the estate, and to commence at my daughter's marriage. All my other property in

moneys, investments, jewels, and chattels of all sorts, is to be divided in equal portions between my daughter, Millicent Conyers Thorndyke, and my nephew, Mark Thorndyke. Should, however, my daughter die before marriage, I bequeath the said estate in the parish of Crowswood to my brother, John Thorndyke, for his life, and after him to his son Mark, and to the latter the whole of my other property of all kinds, this to take effect on the death of my daughter. Should my brother predecease the marriage or coming of age of my daughter, she is at once to come into possession of the said estate of Crowswood. In which case my nephew, Mark, and Mr. James Prendergast, of the firm of Hopwood & Prendergast, my solicitors, are to act as her trustees, and Mrs. Jane Cunningham and the said James Prendergast as her guardians."

All this was, of course, expressed in the usual legal language, but the purport was clear to those previously acquainted with its bearing, the only item that was new to them being the legacy to Mrs. Cunningham. John Thorndyke's testament was a short one. He left all his property to his son Mark, with the exception of £100 to his niece to buy a mourning ring or brooch or other ornament in memory of him, £50 to Mrs. Cunningham for a similar purpose, as a token of his great esteem for her character, and £200 to Ramoo for his faithful services to his brother and himself.

When the lawyer had folded up the wills, Millicent said,—

"On my part, I have to say that I absolutely renounce

the legacy of the estate in favour of my cousin Mark, who has always believed that it would be his."

"And I as absolutely refuse to accept," Mark said.

"My dear young lady," Mr. Prendergast said, quietly, "at present, at any rate, you have no power whatever to take any action in the matter; you are, in the eye of the law, an infant; and until you come of age, you have no power to execute any legal document whatever. Therefore, you must, perforce, remain mistress of the estate until you attain the age of twenty-one. Many things may happen before that time; for example, you might marry, and in that case your husband would have a voice in the matter; you might die, in which case Mr. Mark Thorndyke would, without any effort on your part, come into possession of the estate; but, at any rate, until you reach the age of twenty-one your trustees will collect the rents of the estate on your behalf, and will hold the moneys in trust for you, making, of course, such payments for your support and maintenance as are fit and proper for your condition."

The tears came into Millicent's eyes as she resumed the seat from which she had risen, and she did not utter another word until Mr. Prendergast rose to leave.

"She is thoroughly upset," Mrs. Cunningham said, "and it would be best to let her have her own way for a time. I think the sooner I can get her away from here the better. The house is full of sad memories, and I myself feel shaken and in need of a change."

"I can quite understand her feeling and yours, Mrs. Cunningham. I do hope you will be able to disabuse her mind of the idea that I have any shadow of feeling

of regret that she instead of I has the estate, and please try to work upon her on the ground of her father's wishes. I could see that her face changed when Mr. Prendergast put the matter in that light, which I do not think had occurred to her before. I am thinking of going up to town in a couple of days ; I was thinking of doing so to-morrow, but a day or so will make no difference. I propose that you both go with me, and that I then help you to look for a house. Even if you don't get one at once, a week in London will be a change, and you can then, if you like, go somewhere for a time. Of course, Bath would be too gay at present, but you might go to Tunbridge Wells ; or, if she would like a sea-side place, as she has never been near the sea since she was a baby, that would be the greatest change for her. You might go down for a month or two to Dover or Hastings. There is no occasion for you to settle down in London for a time ; there is Weymouth, if you would like it better. I believe that that is a cheerful place without being too fashionable."

Late in the afternoon Ramoo came in in his usual silent manner. The man had said but little during the past few days, but it was evident that he was grieving deeply, and he looked years older than he had done before that fatal night.

"Of course, Ramoo, you will stay with me for the present. I hardly know what I shall be doing for a time, but I am sure that until I settle down Miss Conyers will be very glad to have you with her."

"No, sahib, Ramoo will return home to India ; Ramoo is getting old ; he was thirty when he entered the service

of the colonel, sahib ; he is forty-six now ; he will go home to end his days ; he has saved enough to live in comfort, and with what the lawyer sahib told him your father had left him,—£200,—he will be a rich man among his own people.”

“But you will find things changed, Ramoo, since you left, while here, you know, we all regard you as a friend rather than as a servant.”

“You are all very kind and good, sahib. Ramoo knows that he will meet no friends like those he has here, but he longs for the bright sun and blue sky of India, and though it will well-nigh break his heart to leave the young missie and you, he feels that he must go.”

“All right, Ramoo ; we shall all be very sorry to lose you, but I understand your longing to go home, and I know that you always feel our cold winter to be very trying to you, therefore I will not oppose your wishes. I shall be going up to town in two or three days, and will arrange to pay your legacy at once, and will enquire what vessels are sailing.”

Although not inclined at the present time to agree with Mark in anything, Millicent could not but acknowledge that it were best that Ramoo should not be urged further to reconsider his determination, and she also fell in with his proposal that they should go up to London for a week and then go down to Weymouth for a time, after which they would be guided by circumstances.

Accordingly, two days later, Mark drove Millicent and Mrs. Cunningham up to London. A groom ac-

accompanied them on Mark's favourite horse. This was to be left in town for his use, and the groom was to drive the carriage back again. Comfortable rooms were obtained in a quiet inn for the ladies, while Mark put up at the Bull, saying that he would come every day to take them out.

Till within the last year Millicent had been little more than a child ; she had looked up to Mark as she might have done to a big brother, something most admirable, as one whose dictum was law. During the last year there had been some slight change, but more perhaps on Mark's part than on hers. He had consulted her wishes more, had asked instead of ordered, and had begun to treat her as if conscious that she was fast growing up into womanhood.

Millicent herself scarcely seemed to have noticed 'this change. She was little more inclined to assert herself than before, but was ready to accompany him whenever he wished her to do so, or to see him go away without complaint when it so pleased him ; but the last week had made a rapid change in their positions. Millicent had sprung almost at a bound into a young woman. She had come to think and resolve for herself ; she was becoming wayward and fanciful ; she no longer deferred to Mark's opinion, but held her own, and was capable of being vexed at his decisions. At any rate, her relations with Mark had changed rapidly, and Mrs. Cunningham considered this little outburst of pettishness to be a good omen for her hopes, and very much better than if they had continued on their old footing of affectionate cousins.

Mark went to the lawyer's and had a long talk with Mr. Prendergast over the lost treasure. On leaving the lawyer's, he went to Bow Street, and related to the chief the circumstances attending his father's murder.

"I have heard them from the man I sent down at your request, Mr. Thorndyke, and, taking the attempt early in the evening and the subsequent murder, there can be no doubt that the affair was one of revenge and not of robbery. Had the second attempt stood alone, robbery might have been the object ; the mere fact that nothing was stolen in no way alters the case. Men are often seized with a certain panic after committing a murder, and fly at once without attempting to carry out their original purpose. Your father no doubt fell heavily, and the man might well have feared that the fall would be heard, but the previous attempt precludes the supposition that robbery was at the bottom of it. It points to a case of revenge, and certainly goes a very long way to support the theory that we talked over when I last saw you, that the highwayman who endeavoured to stop you on the road, whom you wounded, and who afterwards went down to Southampton, was the escaped convict, Bastow. Since that time I have had a man making enquiries along the road between Reigate and Kingston, but altogether without success. I should be glad to follow up any other line that you might suggest, and that might offer any reasonable possibility of success, but I must own that at present we are entirely off the scent."

"I am thinking of devoting myself entirely to the quest. I have no occupation at present. I have an

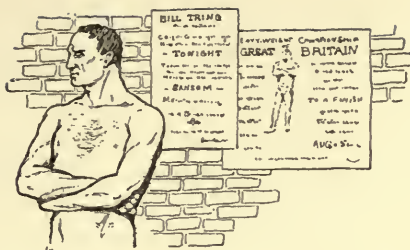
income amply sufficient for my wants, with all expenses that I may incur, and I intend to devote, if necessary, some years of my life to hunting this man down. As your men have searched without success in the country, I think for the present my best plan will be to devote myself to learning something of the ways and haunts of the criminal classes of London, and it is with that object that I have come to you now. I should like, for some time, at any rate, to enter the detective force as an enrolled member. I should, of course, require no pay, but would be prepared to obey all orders and to do any work required, as any other member of the corps would do. I am strong, active, and have, I hope, a fair share of intelligence. I should not mind risking my life in carrying out any duty that you might assign to me. I presume that I need not always be on duty, and could, when not required, employ my time as I liked, and keep up my acquaintances in town. Should it be otherwise, however, I am perfectly ready to submit myself in all respects to your rule. I have a first-rate horse, and would be available for country duty, wherever you might think fit to send me. I should not desire any distinction to be made between me and the paid officers."

"Your proposal is an altogether novel one, Mr. Thorn-dyke, but it is worthy of consideration. I have no doubt that you would make a very useful officer; the work is certainly interesting, though not without serious hazards; however, I will think the matter over, and if you will call in to-morrow you shall have my answer. We are always glad to have a new hand in the force, for the faces of our men are so well known among the criminal class that

they are liable to be detected even under the cleverest disguises. There is work, too, upon which it is absolutely necessary that a gentleman should be employed, and in the event of your joining us, I should wish you to keep the matter strictly from all your acquaintances ; and it would certainly be advantageous that you should, when disengaged, continue to mix with your friends and to mingle in society of all kinds as freely as possible. There is crime among the upper classes as well as among the lower, though of a different type, and as Mr. Thorn-dyke, of Crowswood, you would have far better opportunities of investigating some of these cases than any of my men would have. You would not object to take up such cases ?”

“Not at all, sir ; that is, if it could be arranged that I should not do the actual arresting or have to appear in court as a witness.”

“That could be managed,” the chief said. “When you have got to a certain point the matter of the final arrest could always be handed over to someone else, but, as a rule, we keep our officers in the background as much as possible, because at every trial the court is half-full of men of the criminal class, and the faces of our men would soon be known by every one of them. Well, if you will call about ten o'clock you shall have my answer ; but I should advise you to think the matter well over before you see me again. The responsibilities as well as the dangers are great, and, indeed, through some of the work you would literally have to carry your life in your hand, and I can assure you that the task you undertake is by no means a light one.”



CHAPTER X.

MARK called that evening, as he had promised, upon Mrs. Cunningham.

"I hope that you feel all the better for your day's rest, Millicent," he said.

The girl looked quickly at him to see if there was any sarcasm in the question, but it was evident that the enquiry was made in earnest.

"Yes, I feel better now," she said. "I have dozed a good deal to-day. I did not feel up to anything. Mrs. Cunningham's work has progressed wonderfully. I should say that she has done more to-day than she ordinarily finds time to do in a week. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"I have been having a long talk with Mr. Prendergast about the lost treasure."

"And, of course, he said that you would never find it, Mark?"

"Well, yes, he distinctly expressed that opinion."

"And afterwards?"

"Afterwards I went to Bow Street and had a long talk also with the chief officer there."

"I don't like the idea of your searching for this man, Mark. In the first place, I don't see why you should hope to succeed when the men whose business it is to do such work have failed. In the next place, I think that you may get into serious danger."

"That I must risk, Millicent. I have already proved a better shot than he is, and I am quite ready to take my chance if I can but come upon him ; that is the difficult part of the matter. I know that I shall need patience, but I have plenty of time before me, and have great hopes that I shall run him to earth at last."

"But you would not know him if you saw him?"

"I think I should," Mark said, quietly ; "at least if he is the man I suspect."

"Then you do suspect someone," Mrs. Cunningham said, laying down her work.

"Yes. I know of no reason why you should not know it now. I suspect, indeed, I feel morally certain, that the man who murdered my father was Arthur Bastow."

An exclamation of surprise broke from both his hearers, and they listened with horror while he detailed the various grounds that he had for his suspicions. They were silent for some time after he had brought his narrative to a conclusion, then Mrs. Cunningham said,—

"What a merciful release for Mr. Bastow that he should have died before this terrible thing came out ! For after what you have told us I can hardly doubt that you are right, and that it is this wicked man who is guilty."

"Yes, it was indeed providential," Mark said. "I think that, feeble as he had been for some months, it might have been kept from him. Still, a word from a chance visitor, who did not associate Bastow the murderer with our dear old friend, might have enlightened him, and the blow would have been a terrible one indeed. It is true that as it was he died from the shock, but he did not know the hand that had struck the blow."

"Now that you have told me this," Millicent said, "I cannot blame you, Mark, for determining to hunt the man down. It seems even worse than it did before ; it is awful to think that anyone could cherish revenge like that. Now tell me how you are going to set about it."

"I have promised the chief officer that I will tell absolutely no one," he said. "I have a plan, and I believe that in time it must be successful. I know well enough that I could tell you both of it without any fear of its going farther, but he asked me to promise, and I did so without reservation ; moreover, I think that for some reasons it is as well that even you should not know it. As it is, you are aware that I am going to try, and that is all. If I were to tell you how, you might be picturing all sorts of imaginary dangers and worrying yourselves over it, so I think that it will be much the best that you should remain in ignorance, at any rate, for a time. I can say this : that I shall for the present remain principally in London, and I think that I am more likely to come upon a clue here than elsewhere."

The next morning the chief of the detective department told Mark that he had decided to accept his offer.

"As you will receive no pay," he said, "I shall regard you as a sort of volunteer. For the first two or three months you will spend your time in going about with one or other of my men on his work. They will be able to put you up to disguises. When you have once learned to know all the thieves' quarters and the most notorious receivers of stolen goods, you will be able to go about your work on your own account. All that I require is that you shall report yourself here twice a day. Should I have on hand any business for which you may appear to me particularly well suited, I shall request you to at once undertake it, and from time to time, when there is a good deal of business on hand, I may get you to aid one of my men who may require an assistant in the job on which he is engaged."

"I am sure I am very much obliged to you, sir," Mark said, "and will, I can assure you, do my best in every way to assist your men in any business in which they may be engaged."

"When will you begin?"

"It is Saturday to-day, sir. I think I will postpone setting to until Monday week. My cousin and the lady in whose charge she is came up with me on Thursday, and will be leaving town the end of next week, and I should wish to escort them about while here. I will come on Monday morning ready for work. How had I better be dressed?"

"I should say as a countryman. A convenient character for you to begin with will be that of a man who, having got into a poaching fray and hurt a game-keeper, has made for London as the best hiding-place. You

will be quite uncertain about your future movements, but you are thinking of enlisting."

"Very well, sir ; I will get the constable at Reigate, who knows me well, to send me a suit. I might find it difficult to get all the things I want here."

Accordingly, for the next week, Mark devoted himself to the ladies. Millicent, in her interest in the work that he was about to undertake, had now quite got over her fit of ill-temper, and the old cordial relations were renewed. On Friday he saw them into the Weymouth coach, then sauntered off to his friend Chetwynd's lodgings. Ramoo had already sailed. On his arrival in town he had said that he should, if possible, arrange to go out as a steward.

"Many men of my colour who have come over here with their masters go back in that way," he said, in answer to Mark's remonstrances. "It is much more comfortable that way than as a passenger. If you go third class, rough fellows laugh and mock ; if you go second class, men look as much as to say, 'What is that coloured fellow doing here? This is no place for him.' Much better go as steward ; not very hard work ; very comfortable ; plenty to eat ; no one to laugh or make fun."

"Well, perhaps it would be best, when one comes to think of it, Ramoo ; but I would gladly pay your passage in any class you like."

"Ramoo go his own way, sahib," he said. "No pay passage money ; me go to docks where boats are sailing, go on board and see head steward. Head steward glad enough to take good servant who is will-

ing to work his way out, and ask for no wages. Head steward draw wages for him and put wages in his own pocket. He very well satisfied."

On Wednesday he came and told Mark that he had arranged to sail in the "Nabob," and was to go on board early the next morning. He seemed a great deal affected, and Mark and Millicent were equally sorry to part with the faithful fellow.

"Well, old fellow," Dick Chetwynd said, when Mark entered the room, where he was still at breakfast, "I was beginning to wonder whether you had gone back to Reigate again. Why, when I saw you last Friday you told me that you would look me up in a day or two."

"I have been busy showing London to Mrs. Cunningham and Miss Conyers," he replied,—for Millicent had insisted on keeping her former name, at any rate for the present,—and Mark was somewhat glad that there had been no necessity for entering into any explanation. It was agreed that when he went down to discharge some of the servants and called upon his friends he should say nothing of the change in his position, but should assign as a motive that he intended to travel about for a long time, and that he felt that he could not settle down in the lonely house, at any rate, for two or three years, and therefore intended to diminish the establishment.

"You will have some breakfast, Mark?"

"No, thank you. I breakfasted two hours ago."

"Then you still keep to your intention to stay in London for a while?"

"Yes. I don't feel that I could bear the house alone," Mark replied. "You see, Mrs. Cunningham and my uncle's ward could not very well remain in a bachelor's home, and naturally, after what has happened, they would not like to do so even if they could. They have gone down to Weymouth for a few weeks for a complete change; and Mrs. Cunningham talks of taking a house in town till they return to Crowswood. I am going to look for lodgings, and I want your advice as to the quarter likely to suit me."

"Why not take up your abode here for a time? There is a vacant room, and I should be very glad to have you with me."

"Thank you very much, Dick, but for a time I should prefer being alone. You will have friends dropping in to see you, and at present I should be poor company. It will be some little time before I shall feel equal to society."

"Of course, Mark. I always speak first and think afterwards, as you know pretty well by this time. Well, what sort of lodgings do you want?"

"I want them to be in a good but not in a thoroughly fashionable street. In time, no doubt, I shall like a little society, and shall get you to introduce me to some of the quieter of your friends, and so gradually feel my way."

"I will do all that sort of thing for you, Mark. As you know, I'm not one of those who see much fun in gambling or drinking, though one must play a little to be in the fashion. Still, I never go heavily into it. I risk a few guineas and then leave it. My own inclinations lie rather towards sport, and in this I can indulge

without being out of the fashion. All the tip-top people now patronise the ring, and I do so in my small way too. I am on good terms with all the principal prize-fighters, and put on the gloves with one or other of them pretty nearly every day. I have taken a course of lessons regularly from four or five of them, and I can tell you that I can hold my own with most of the Corinthians. It is a grand sport, and I don't know how I should get on without it ; after the hard exercise I was accustomed to down in the country, it keeps one's muscles in splendid order ; and I can tell you that, if one happens to get into a fight in the streets, it is no light thing to be able to polish off an antagonist in a round or two without getting a mark on your face that would keep you a prisoner in your room for a week or more."

"Yes, I should like very much to take lessons too, Dick ; it is one of the things that I have always wished to do. I suppose one can do it of an evening or any time you like ?"

"Yes ; any hour suits those fellows. You ought to get either a heavy middle weight or a light heavy weight ; you will be a heavy weight yourself by the time you have filled out. Let me think ; what is your height ?—six feet one, if I remember rightly."

"Yes, that is about it."

"Well, with your shoulders and long reach and activity, you ought to be something out of the way if you take pains, Mark. You see I am barely five feet ten, and am something like two stone lighter than you are, and I only just come into the middle weights. I suppose you are not much under twelve stone and a half."

"That is just about my weight ; I weighed at the miller's only a fortnight ago."

"Good ! I will make some enquiries, and see who would be the best man to take you in hand to begin with. And now about lodgings. Well, I should say Essex Street or any of those streets running down from the Strand would suit you. The rooms in Essex Street are bigger than those in Buckingham Street, and you will find anything between the two in some of the others ; but I may as well saunter round there with you. Of course, money is no object to you."

"No," Mark agreed, "but I don't want big rooms. I think a small one, when you are sitting by yourself, is more cosy and comfortable."

Finally, two rooms were taken in Villiers Street ; they were of moderate size and handsomely furnished, the last tenant having fitted them out for himself, but had lived to enjoy them only three months, having at the end of that time been killed in a duel over a quarrel at cards.

"I have to make some calls this afternoon, Mark. At seven this evening I will look in at your lodgings, and you shall go along with me to Ingleston's, in St. Giles's. It is one of the head-quarters of the fancy, and Jack Needham, who taught me, is safe to be there, and he will tell me who he thinks is best for you to begin with."

Accordingly, after taking luncheon, they separated, and Mark went to his inn.

Ingleston's was at that time regarded as the head-quarters of the fancy. At the back of the house was

a large room, with benches rising behind each other to accommodate the spectators. Here, on the evenings when it was known that leading men would put on the gloves, peers of the realm would sit side by side with sporting butchers, and men of fashion back their opinion on a coming prize fight with ex-pugilists and publicans. A number of men were assembled in the bar ; among these was Jack Needham.

"Good evening, Mr. Chetwynd," the man said, as they came up to him. "It is going to be a good night. Tring and Bob Pratt are going to have a round or two together, and Gibbons will put on the gloves with anyone who likes to take him on."

"This gentleman is Mr. Thorndyke, a squire, Jack, whose place is near mine at Reigate. He has come up to town for a few months, and wants to learn how to use his mauleys. I told him that you would advise him as to who would be the best man for him to go to."

"I can tell you better when I have seen him strip, sir. There is no one in the big room at present. It won't be open for half an hour. Ingleston keeps it shut as long as he can so as to give everyone a fair chance of a good place. If the gentleman will come in there with me I will have a look at him."

Mark expressed his willingness to be looked at, and the man having gone and got the key of the room from Ingleston, went in with them and locked the door behind.

"Now, sir, if you will strip to the waist I shall be better able to say who you had better have than I can now."



Mark stripped, and the man walked around him critically.

Mark stripped, and the man walked round and round him, examining him critically.

"He's a big 'un," he said to Dick when he had completed his examination. "He has got plenty of muscle and frame, and ought to be a tremendous hitter; he is about the figure of Gibbons, and if he goes in for it really, ought to make well-nigh as good a man, if not quite. I don't think Bill would care about taking him up till he knows a bit about it. I tell you what, sir, you will be too big altogether for me by the time you get to be quick on your legs and to use your strength, but if you like I will take you on for a month or so, or, say, two months; by that time I think you will be good enough to go to Gibbons. I will just call him in if you don't mind; he came in just before you."

In a couple of minutes he came in with a man of similar height and somewhat similar figure to Mark.

"This is Gibbons, sir, ex-champion, and like enough he might be champion now if he chose; as fine a boxer as ever stripped, but he is ring-maker now to the P. C., and it suits him better to do that and to teach, than to have a chance of getting a battle once a year or so."

"Have you a great many pupils, Gibbons?"

The man shook his head.

"I am too big, sir; gentleman like to learn from some one about their own weight, or perhaps a bit lighter, and there are not many of them who would care to stand up against a man who has been champion, and so I have plenty of time on my hands. I am a hard hitter, too, even with the gloves; that is one reason why Jack had best take you on until you get a little handy with your fists. I do

more in the dog fancier line than I do with boxing, but there is nothing I like better than getting the gloves on with an amateur who is likely to be a credit to me. That is my card, sir ; you will find me in pretty nearly any time of the day, and I have got a place behind the house where I do teaching when I get a chance. It is handy in one way, because you can drop in and take a lesson any time you like."

"That would suit me exceedingly well," Mark said ; "and when I have a couple of months with Needham I will come to you."

Mark now put on his clothes again, and they went out together and re-entered a few minutes later when the door was open. The benches were soon crowded. Mark had been to several prize-fights with Dick Chetwynd, had often boxed with him and other lads, and had had lessons from an ex-prize-fighter at Reigate, and was therefore able to appreciate the science shown by the various men who confronted each other. The event of the evening was the contest between Tring and Bob Pratt ; both were very powerful men, who were about to go into strict training for matches that had been made for them against two west countrymen, who were thought very highly of by their friends, and who were regarded as possible candidates for the championship.

Bob Pratt was a stone heavier than his opponent, but far less active, and owed his position more to his ability to take punishment, and to hard-hitting powers, than to his science. In the two rounds that were fought, Tring had the advantage, but the general opinion was that in the long run the other would wear him down. Both

fought with good temper, and were warmly applauded as they shook hands at the finish.

"I think I should back Tring in a fight," Mark said, as the meeting broke up, "but it is difficult to say, for he is in better condition than the other, and it may be that when both are thoroughly fit the heavy man might show more improvement than he would."

The hat was passed round at the conclusion. Every man dropped in his guinea, some more, it being understood that the collection was to be divided between the two men to pay the expenses of their training.



CHAPTER XI.

THREE or four days later Mark received a message that the chief wanted to speak with him that afternoon, and he accordingly went down.

“I’ve got a job for you, Mr. Thorndyke ; it is just the sort of thing that will suit you. There is a house in Buckingham Street that we have had our eye on for some time ; it is a gambling-house, but with that we have nothing to do unless complaints are made, but we have had several complaints of late. It is a well-got-up place, and there are a good many men of title frequent it, but men of title are not always more honest than other people ; anyhow, there are some rooks there, and several young fellows of means have been pigeoned and ruined. They are mighty particular who they let in, and there would be very little chance of getting my regular men in there. Now, you are a stranger in London, but you have friends here, and no doubt you could get introduced. We want to know if the play is fair ; if it isn’t, we would break the place up altogether. We

know enough to do it now ; but none of the poor beggars who have been ruined will come forward, and, indeed, haven't any idea, I think, that they have lost their money in anything but a run of bad luck.

“ One young fellow blew his brains out last week, and his father came here with a lot of what are called debts of honour, which he found in his room. There they are, and the names of the men they are owed to ; of course, some of them have been fairly won, but I have a strong suspicion that those I have marked with a cross have not. For instance, there is Sir William Flash, a fellow who was turned out of White's two years ago for sharp practice with cards ; there is John Emerson : he is a man of good family, but all his friends have given him up long ago, and he has been living by his wits for the last five years. The others marked are all of the same sort. Now, what I want you to do is to become a frequenter of the place ; of course, you will have to play a little, and as you are a stranger I expect that they will let you win for a bit ; but if not, the old gentleman has placed £200 in my hands for the expenses.”

“ I could play on my own money,” Mark said, rather warmly.

“ You forget, Mr. Thorndyke,” the chief said, firmly, “ that at the present moment you are a member of my force, and that you go to this place in that capacity, and not as Squire of Crowswood ; therefore, you must, if you please, do as I instruct you. The gentleman will be ready to pay that sum. As you see, the amounts entered here total up to nearly £10,000. He said that it will ruin him to pay that sum, but that he must do so

rather than his son should be branded as a defaulter. I have advised him to write to all these people saying that it will take him some time to raise the money, but that he will see that nobody shall be a loser by his son's debts. I have told him that I will in the meantime endeavour to get proof that the play was not fair, and in that case he would, of course, refuse to pay any of the claims on that ground ; and you may be sure that if unfair play were proved, none of those concerned would dare to press their claims."

"Then my function would be simply to watch?"

"Yes, to watch, and to bring me word of anything you may observe. You see, without making a public scandal, if it could be found that a man was discovered cheating, and the way in which he was doing it, one would be able to put a stronger pressure on him, that not only might he be forced to abstain from going to any club, but would be frightened into giving up any I.O.U.'s he might hold."

"I shall be glad to do the best I can, sir ; but, frankly, I know next to nothing of cards, and should have but little chance of detecting anything that might be going on, when it must be done so cleverly that experienced gamblers, watching a man closely, fail to see anything wrong."

"I quite understand that, but one of my men has made a study of the various methods employed by gamblers to cheat, and although it would take you years to learn how to do it yourself, a few hours' instruction from him would at least put you up to some of their methods, and enable you to know where to look for

cheating. The man is now waiting in the next room, and if you will take two or three hours daily with him, say for a week, you ought to be able to detect the doings of those fellows when to others everything seems right and above board. You may have no inclination for cards, but knowledge of that sort is useful to anyone in society, here or anywhere else, and may enable him either to save his own pocket or to do a service to a friend."

In the course of a week's practice Mark learned where to look for cheating; he could not, indeed, follow the fingers of his instructor, for even when he knew what was going to be done, the movements were so rapid that his eye could not follow it, and in nine cases out of ten he was unable to say whether the coup had been accomplished or not.

The week's instruction was lengthened to a fortnight, and at the end of that time Mark went to Dick Chetwynd.

"Do you know, Dick," he said, "a gambling-place in Buckingham Street?"

"I know that there is a hell there, Mark, but I have never been in it; why do you ask?"

"I have rather a fancy to go there," he replied. "I hear that although a good many men of fashion haunt the place, the crowd is rather a mixed one."

"It has a bad name, Mark; I have heard some queer reports about it."

"Yes, so have I. I should think that it is a very likely place for a man like Bastow to go to if he has any liking for play. Of course, he would get up as a

gentleman. At any rate, I have been making what enquiries I can in some of the thieves' quarters, and have come to the conclusion that he is not likely to have taken up his abode there, and I don't think I can do better than make a round of some of these doubtful houses. I should like to begin with this and then work downward."

"Well, I daresay I could manage it, Mark ; I know half a dozen men who play there ; they say there is more fun and excitement to be got than at White's or Crockford's, or any of those places ; some men, of course, play high, but a good many who go there only risk a few guineas ; some go because it is the proper thing at present for a man about town either to play or to bet on horses or cock-fights, or to patronise the ring, and, after all, it is easier to stroll for an hour or two of an evening into comfortable rooms where you meet a lively set and there is champagne always going, than it is to attend races or prize-fights."

There were few days that passed that Mark did not go in for half an hour's chat with his friend, and two days after this conversation Dick said,—

"By the way, Mark, I have arranged for us to go to that hell to-night ; young Boldero, who is a member of my club, told me some time ago that he played there sometimes. I met him yesterday evening, and said that I had a fancy to go and have a look at it, and that a friend of mine from the country also wanted to go ; he said at once that he would take us there."

Accordingly, that evening Mark met Boldero, whom he had once or twice before seen in Dick's company,

and the three went together to the house in Buckingham Street. Boldero nodded to the door-keeper as he went in, and they then proceeded upstairs and entered a handsome room with comfortable sofas and chairs on which a dozen men were seated, for the most part smoking. Several champagne bottles stood on the tables, and all who liked helped themselves. Boldero was known to several of those present, while two or three were also known to Dick. Boldero introduced them both to his friends. One of these was the Hon. John Emerson, a man of some five and thirty, with a languid air and a slight drawl.

After chatting for a few minutes Mark went with his two companions upstairs. The room they now entered was furnished as a drawing-room, except that in the middle was a table, round which some fifteen people were seated, while as many more looked on; round the room were several small tables on which were packs of cards. These were for those who preferred to play piquet or écarté, two or three couples being so engaged. Mark knew enough of cards to know that hazard was being played at the large table. There was an inner room, and Mark strolled across and looked in. It was at present untenanted; it contained a centre-table capable of accommodating four, and two or three small ones, with two chairs set in readiness to each.

"That is where the heavy play goes on," Boldero said; "none of your four- or five-guinea wagers there, fifties and hundreds are nearer the mark, and I have seen a thousand wagered many a time. It is exciting work even looking on, I can tell you; what it must be

for the players I cannot say, but I should think it must be frightful."

Mark took up his stand at the hazard table, and after looking on for some little time began to play. Beginning with guineas he gradually, as luck favoured him, played five guineas, and after half an hour's play won fifty. Then luck turned, and in a few minutes he had lost all he won.

"You ought to have stopped, Mark," Dick said, reproachfully, as he stepped back from his place, which was at once filled by one who had been standing behind him.

The play in the inner room had now begun, and Mark went in and joined those who were looking on. In half an hour one of the players had had enough, and a young man said to Emerson, who was standing on the other side of the table,—

"Now, Mr. Emerson, will you give me my revenge?"

"I would really rather not, Mr. Cotter. The luck has been so one-sided lately that I would rather leave it alone."

"But it may turn to-night," the other said. "At any rate, I will try it if you have no objection."

There was a certain eagerness in the young man's voice that caused Mark to watch him closely. He was a good-looking young fellow, but his face was not a strong one, and although he evidently tried to assume an appearance of indifference as he sat down, there was a nervous movement of his fingers. Mark took his place behind him as play began. The game was *écarté*, and for a time Emerson lost.

"I think the luck has changed, Mr. Cotter, but as we generally raise the stakes after playing for a bit, I am ready to do so. Shall we make it £50 again?"

"With pleasure," the young man said.

He won the next two games, then for some time they won alternately.

"Shall we say a hundred again?" he said.

"As you like," Emerson replied. "We don't seem to get much forwarder either way at present."

A considerable number of lookers-on had now gathered round. So far Mark, although watching the fingers of the opposite player intently, had seen no sign whatever of unfair play. He now redoubled his attention. Cotter won the first game, his adversary the three next. Mark noticed now that after looking at his hand Emerson looked abstractedly as if meditating before taking the next step; there was no expression in his face, but Mark fancied that his eyes rested for a moment on the man standing next to himself. He looked at his watch, and then, as if finding the hour later than he had expected, moved away from his place and presently joined Dick, who was standing with Boldero on the other side of the table.

"Who is the man playing with Emerson?" he asked, in a whisper.

"He is the son of Cotter, the head of Cotter's Bank, in Lombard Street."

As the men were standing two or three deep round the table, Mark could not see the table itself, but this mattered little, for his attention was entirely directed towards the man standing behind Cotter's chair. He

saw that after glancing down at the young man's hand, he looked across as if seeing what Emerson was going to do ; sometimes his eyes dropped for an instant, at other times there was no such movement, and after noticing this four or five times, and noticing the course Emerson took, he had no doubt whatever in his own mind that the movement of the man's eyes was an intimation to Emerson of the nature of Cotter's hand. The young man had lost four games in succession ; he had grown very pale, but showed no other signs of agitation. Presently he said,—

“You have your usual luck again ; I will only play one more game to-night, but we may as well make it worth playing. Shall we say five hundred ?”

“At your service,” Emerson replied.

This time the face of the man standing behind Cotter's chair was immovable, and Mark, placing himself behind a short man and straining his head forward, saw that Cotter scored four. The next time there was still no sign. Emerson showed a king and scored it, and then won every trick and the game.

“That makes £900,” the young man said, quietly, writing an I.O.U. for that amount and handing it to Emerson. There was a general movement of the spectators, and two fresh players took the seats vacated by the late antagonists.

“Who was the man standing behind Cotter's chair ?” Mark asked Boldero.

“That is Sir James Flash ; he is just going to play, you see ; it is sure to be another hot game, and an interesting one.”

"Well, I think I will go," Mark said; "the heat of the room has given me a bit of a headache. I will see you to-morrow, Dick."

"Good-night old man," Chetwynd said, and, shaking hands with Boldero, Mark went downstairs immediately after Cotter. The latter went into the room below, drank off a tumbler of champagne, and then went down, took his hat, and went out. Mark followed him for a short distance, and joined him as soon as he got up into the Strand.

"Mr. Cotter," he said, "I have not the pleasure of knowing you personally, and I must introduce myself. My name is Mark Thorndyke, and I am the owner of an estate close to Reigate; would you mind my exchanging a few words with you?"

Cotter looked up, and was about to give a flat refusal, but the expression of Mark's face was so friendly and pleasant that he changed his mind and said, in a hard voice,—

"I really do not know what you can have to say to me, Mr. Thorndyke, but of course I can hardly refuse to hear you."

They walked across the road and turned up a quiet street.

"For certain reasons it is not necessary for me to explain," Mark said. "I went to that place for the first time to-night, and I watched the play between you and Mr. Emerson."

"It does not matter, sir. I lost, and I am not going there again."

"I hope, on the contrary, that you will go there again,

Mr. Cotter ; if I mistake not, from what I heard, you have lost considerable sums to that man."

"I imagine, sir, that that is no business of a stranger."

"In no way personally," Mark replied, not heeding the angry ring in the voice, "but as an honest man it does concern me. I am absolutely convinced, sir, that that money has not been won from you fairly."

The young man gave a start.

"Impossible," he said, shortly. "Mr. Emerson is a man of good family and a gentleman."

"He is a man of good family, I admit, but certainly not a gentleman ; his antecedents are notorious."

"I have never heard a word against him ; he is intimate with Sir James Flash and other gentlemen of position."

"I am not surprised that you have not heard of it ; it was probably to the interest of several persons that you should not do so. Nor do I suppose that you are aware that Sir James Flash was himself expelled from White's for cheating at cards."

"Impossible !" Mr. Cotter replied.

"I can assure you of the fact," Mark said, quietly. "Probably you have among your acquaintances some members of White's. I am sure if you ask them they will confirm the fact. Now, sir, I can assure you that I have no interest in this matter save to prevent a gentleman from being ruined by blacklegs. May I ask how much you owe to Mr. Emerson and Sir James Flash?"

The young man hesitated.

"I believe you, sir," he said, at last. "They hold my I.O.U.'s for £29,000. I need hardly say it is absolute

ruin. My intention is to make a clean breast to my father about it to-morrow morning. My father will give me the money, in the first place, because he loves me, and would save my name from disgrace ; and, in the second, because were I posted as a defaulter it would strike a severe blow at the credit of the bank. So he will give me the money, but he will bid me leave his house for ever. That will matter little, for I shall pay the money and to-morrow night I shall blow out my brains."

"Well, sir, if you will follow my advice you will neither pay the money nor blow out your brains. I saw enough to-night to feel absolutely certain that you have been cheated. Sir James Flash stood behind you, and was, I am sure, signalling your hand to Emerson. I believe that Emerson played fair otherwise until the last game, but I am convinced that he then cheated. You had good hands, but he had better ; and although I did not see him cheat—for I was on the other side of the table—I am convinced that he did so. Now, sir, I advise you to go in as usual to-morrow evening, and to play, raising your stakes as you did to-night. When the time comes I will expose him. Should I not be able to detect him, we must try another night. I am so much convinced that this is the case, and that I shall succeed, that, whether you play one night or three, I will guarantee that you shall be no loser, but will, on the honour of a gentleman, place in your hands the amount of your losses ; so that you will not have to ask your father for a cheque larger than you would do if you confessed to him to-morrow morning. I only ask in re-

turn that you, on your part, will give me your word of honour that you will never touch a card again."

"I cannot accept so generous an offer from a stranger," Cotter said, in a low voice.

"I do not think that it is generous," Mark replied, quietly, "because I am perfectly convinced that I shall not have to pay at all. Have you any other I.O.U.'s out?"

"I have given them for about £5000, but that is not in addition to the £29,000. Emerson told me that as he knew that I should have difficulty in paying them at the present moment, he had taken them up and held them with his own."

"Will you give me the names of the persons to whom you gave them in the first place?"

"Certainly." And he mentioned three names, all of which stood with a black cross against them on Mark's list.

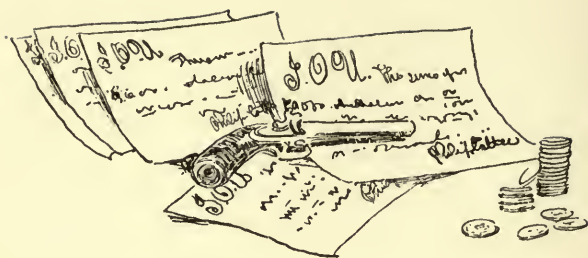
"Thank you. Then you will go to-morrow night again?"

"Yes, and I swear to you that I will never touch a card afterwards."

"I don't think that you need fear," Mark said. "I have not been long in London, but I happen to have been shown a good many of the tricks that these black-legs play on greenhorns, which will account for my having noticed what has never been observed by the honest portion of the men who frequent the place. Now I will say good-night, sir. I shall be behind your chair or his to-morrow night."

"I don't know what to say," Cotter said, hesitatingly.

“There is no occasion to say anything ; it is the duty of every honest man to interfere if he sees another honest man being robbed, and that is my sole object in this matter. Good-night.” And turning round he walked rapidly away.



CHAPTER XII.

THE next morning, before going round to Gibbons, Mark saw his chief, and told him of what had taken place on the previous evening.

Mark then went to Chetwynd.

"Well, what did you think of it last night?"

"Well, I own that it went against my grain to see that young fellow being victimised by a sharper."

"My dear Mark, you must not use such language as that. I fancy from what I have heard that the Honourable John is not altogether an estimable character, but to call him a sharper is going too far altogether."

"I don't think that it is, for from what I saw last night I am pretty well convinced that he did not play fair. I mean to go again to-night."

"Well, I will go, Mark. I need not ask Boldero, for he told me that he should look in again at ten o'clock this evening, for he thought that another night's play would probably bring Cotter to the end of his tether."

Accordingly, a little before ten they walked into the gambling-house together.

Soon after ten Cotter and Emerson again sat down, and as usual a lot of spectators gathered round the table. The game resembled the one on the previous evening. Mark placed himself by the side of Cotter, a stranger stood immediately behind his chair, another member of the club was on the other side, and Sir James Flash stood partly behind him, so that, although somewhat in the background, he could obtain a view between their heads of Cotter's cards. Mark saw to his satisfaction that Dick and Boldero had secured the exact position that he wished them to take. For the first few games the play was even, and Dick began to think that Mark had been mistaken, for Flash appeared to take little interest in the game, and made no sign how Emerson should proceed.

As soon as the stake rose to a hundred again, he distinctly saw Flash close his eyes and play with his moustache; he called Boldero's attention to the fact, and found the latter, who had also been watching, had noticed it. By the time a few games had been played, he verified Mark's assertion that these signs were signals that Cotter's hand was a bad one, and in each case Emerson played without giving his opponent the opportunity of discarding and taking in fresh cards. He and Dick nodded quietly to Mark, who had satisfied himself that so far Emerson had not cheated in any other way. As on the previous evening, Cotter, after losing five or six hundred pounds, proposed a final game of five hundred. Mark bent down his head, so that the intentness

of his gaze should not be noticed, but from under his eyebrows he watched Emerson's every movement ; suddenly he placed a foot on the edge of the chair of the man sitting in front of him, and with a sudden spring leapt upon the table, seized Emerson's hand, and held it up to the full length of his arm.

"Gentlemen," he shouted, "this fellow is cheating ; there is a card in his hand which he has just brought from under the table."

In a moment there was a dead silence of surprise : then Mark forced the hand open and took Emerson's card, which he held up.

"There, you see, gentlemen, it is a king." Then a babel of sounds arose, a dozen hands were laid upon Emerson, who was pulled back from his chair and thrown down on a sofa, while hands were run over his coat, waistcoat, and breeches.

"Here they are," a man shouted, and held a dozen cards over his head.

The place of concealment had been cleverly chosen : the breeches apparently buttoned closely at the knee, but in reality they were loose enough to enable a finger and thumb to be passed between them and the stocking, and in the lining of the breeches was a pocket in which the cards had been placed, being held there by two pieces of whalebone, that closed the pocket. The searchers, among whom were Dick and Boldero, did not have it all their own way ; four or five men rushed upon them, and endeavoured to pull them off Emerson. The din of voices was prodigious, but Mark, still standing on the table, stilled it for a moment by shouting,—

"The scoundrel has an accomplice, who this evening and yesterday has been signalling the strength of the cards in Mr. Cotter's hands."

"Who is he?" was shouted over the room.

"It is Sir James Flash," Mark said. "I denounce him as a cheat and a sharper."

As pale as death, Flash rushed to the table.

"I don't know who you are, sir," he said, in a tone of concentrated rage, "but you are a liar, and you shall answer for this in the morning."

"I will answer to any gentleman that calls me to account," Mark said, in a ringing voice, "but I don't meet a man who has been expelled from White's for cheating, and who I have no doubt is well stocked with cards at the present moment, in readiness for the victim that he is next going to meet after the plucking of Mr. Cotter has been done. Now, gentlemen, search him, and see if I am wrong; if I am, I will apologise for that part of my accusation."

Flash drew a pistol from his pocket, but in an instant his arm was seized by those standing round him, and it exploded harmlessly. Among those who seized Flash was the man who had played with him the previous evening. In spite of his struggles and curses, and the efforts of his friends to rescue him, he too was thrown down and eight court cards were found concealed in his sleeve. The uproar while this was going on had been tremendous, but it was suddenly stilled as four men in dark clothes entered the room. Each held in his hand the well-known symbol of his office, the little ebony staff surmounted by a silver crown.

"I arrest all present in the name of the king," one said, "for breaking the laws against gambling, and for brawling and the use of fire-arms. Now, gentlemen, resistance is useless ; I must request that you each give me your card, and your word of honour that you will appear at Bow Street to-morrow morning."

In five minutes the house was deserted.

"How can I thank you, Mr. Thorndyke," Cotter, who was one of those who had seized Flash's arm, diverted his aim, and searched him, said, when they got outside the house ; "you have saved my life. It did not seem possible to me that you could succeed in showing that I was being cheated, and I had firmly resolved that, instead of allowing you to suffer loss, I would to-morrow morning make a clean breast of the whole affair to my father, as I had intended to have done this morning."

"If I might advise you, Mr. Cotter, I should say, carry out your intention so far as making a clean breast of it is concerned. Happily, you are free from debt, as those I.O.U.'s are worthless, for they were obtained from you by cheating, therefore you have no demand to make upon his purse. The police will, I have no doubt, endeavour to keep this thing quiet, but your name may come out, and it would be far better that your father should hear this story from you than elsewhere ; and your assurance that you will never touch a card again, and the heavy lesson that you have had, will doubtless induce him to look at the matter leniently. It will no doubt be a painful story to tell, but it will be far better told by you."

"I will do it, sir. As you say, the lesson has been a

heavy one, and henceforth my father shall have no reason to complain of me. May I call and see you to-morrow evening?"

"Certainly. I shall be at home from seven to eight, after which hour I have an engagement. Good-night."

Cotter walked on and Mark fell back and joined Dick and Boldero, who had fallen behind when they saw him speaking to Cotter.

"Well, Mark, I congratulate you," Dick Chetwynd said. "You did it wonderfully, though how on earth you knew that fellow had a card in his hand is more than I can guess."

"That is easily explained," Mark said. "Not wishing to fall a victim, I have of late been put up to a great many of these sharpers' tricks by a man who at one time had been in the trade himself."

"That was a capital idea, Mark," Dick said. "I wish you would introduce me to him."

"I won't do that, Dick, but I shall be very glad to teach you all I know myself about it; but I fancy that after this you will be in no great hurry to enter a gambling-hell again."

"That is so, Mark. I have never had any great inclination for play, but after this you may be quite sure that I will fight shy of cards altogether; still, I shall be glad if you will put me up to some of these tricks, for I may be able to some day save a victim of card-sharpers, as you have done this evening."

The next morning, when those who had been present at the scene of the previous evening arrived at the office of the detectives in Bow Street, they were shown

into some private rooms and asked to wait. Cotter, Mark, and his two friends first had an interview with the chief.

"You will understand," the latter said, "that this is an altogether informal affair. I propose you first tell me your story as briefly as possible."

This was done.

"Now, Mr. Cotter, I take it that you do not wish to prosecute."

"Certainly not. I would, in fact, give anything rather than appear in it."

"You have said that, in addition to the I.O.U.'s that you have given to the two men caught cheating, they hold others to the amount of some £5000 or £6000, given by you to three other frequenters of the club. In fact, these papers have been found in Emerson's pocket-book; he told you, I believe, that he had taken them up so that you should not be inconvenienced by them. I understand, then, that you will be quite content if you get these I.O.U.'s back again; those given to Emerson and Flash are, of course, worthless. After what has happened, they could not be presented, but probably you might have trouble about the others, for, though I have no doubt that all of the men were in league together, we have no means of absolutely proving it."

"I shall be more than content, sir; I have no wish to prosecute."

"We are glad," the chief said, "to be able to close a dangerous place, and as the exposure would put a stop to the career of these two men and no doubt alarm a good many others, we don't care about taking the mat-

ter into court. Such gross scandals as this are best kept quiet, when there is no object in ventilating them. Therefore, gentlemen, as Mr. Cotter is willing to do so, we shall let the matter drop. I shall be obliged if you will step into the next room, however, until I have seen these three men."

When they had left, the three were brought in.

"You have been concerned, sirs," the chief said, sternly, "in winning large sums of money from the Hon. William Denton, from Mr. James Carew, from Mr. William Hobson, and others; in all of these cases, the two men caught cheating last night were also concerned. You all hold notes of hand of Mr. Hobson. I shall advise that gentleman's father to refuse to pay those notes, and promise him that if any further request for payment is made, I will furnish him with such particulars for publication as will more than justify him in the eyes of the world in refusing to honour them. You, as well as Mr. Emerson and Sir James Flash, have won large sums from Mr. Cotter, and the fact that the I.O.U.'s he gave you were found on Mr. Emerson points very strongly to their being in confederacy with you in the matter; at any rate, they point so strongly that, whether a jury would convict or not on the evidence that we shall be able to lay before them, there can be no question whatever as to what the opinion of men of honour will be. These I.O.U.'s are in our hands. Mr. Cotter does not desire to pursue the case; he will, however, refuse absolutely to pay those I.O.U.'s, and in doing so he will have the approval of all honourable men. That being so, the I.O.U.'s are absolutely useless

to you, and if you will agree to my tearing them up now, he has most kindly consented to let the matter drop in your cases."

The three men, who had all turned very white when he was speaking, now protested angrily against imputations being made on their honour.

"Well, sirs," the officer said, "in that case the matter can, of course, go on. You know best what the feeling will be as to these I.O.U.'s. They will form an important item of evidence against you, you will see. As the matter stands, either you gave them to Emerson to collect for you, without any money passing between you, a very strange procedure, which you will find it difficult to explain, or else he gave you the coin for them and you passed them over to him, and have therefore parted with all claim on Mr. Cotter on your own account. Of course, I impound them with the other I.O.U.'s as proof of a conspiracy between you. Now, sirs, am I to tear them up or not?"

The three men looked at each other, and then one of them said,—

"We protest altogether against the assertion, sir, but at the same time, as there can be little doubt that Emerson and Sir James Flash have played unfairly, and we do not wish any association of our names with theirs, we are perfectly willing that the I.O.U.'s which, under the circumstances, we should never have dreamt of presenting, should be destroyed."

"I think that you have chosen wisely," the chief said, drily. "It is a pity that you did not do so at first. These are the I.O.U.'s he gave to one or other of you.

Perhaps it would be pleasanter for you to destroy them yourselves."

The three men took the papers with their names on them and tore them up.

"Thank you," he went on, sarcastically. "That will place you in a better position. You will be able to tell your friends that you felt so indignant at the manner in which Mr. Cotter had been swindled by Emerson and Flash that you at once destroyed his I.O.U.'s for the sums that you had won of him. But, gentlemen,"—he spoke sternly now,—“remember that we have a long list against you, and that the next victim, or let us say his father, might be more disposed to push matters to their full length than is Mr. Cotter. Remember, also, that we keep ourselves acquainted with what is going on, and that should trouble arise we shall produce all the complaints that have been made against you, and shall also mention your connection with this affair, in which, as I understand, you all did your best to prevent those two fellows from being searched."

Without saying another word the three men went out of the room, too crestfallen to make even an attempt at keeping up their air of indignation. The others were then called in.

"I am sorry, gentlemen," he said, "that you have had the trouble of coming here, for the gentleman swindled has declined to prosecute the swindlers, and you will understand that he is somewhat anxious that his name should not appear in the matter. Fortunately, as instead of paying in cash he gave I.O.U.'s for his losses, he will not be a loser to any large amount by

these transactions. I may say that the proprietor of the hell has been here this morning, and to avoid trouble he has consented to close his place for good. I have only to remark that I should advise you, gentlemen, in future, only to indulge in gambling in places where you may be fairly assured of the character of the men you play with. I think, in conclusion, that you may all feel grateful to Mr. Cotter for refusing to prosecute. It has saved you from having to appear in court as witnesses in so utterly disreputable an affair."

There was a general murmur of assent, and in a minute or two the room was clear. Flash and Emerson were then brought in, with a constable on each side of them.

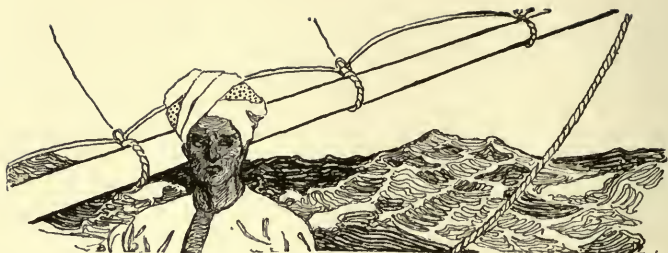
"Mr. Cotter has, I regret to say, declined to prosecute, and Mr. Thorndyke has done the same with regard to Sir James Flash's use of his pistol. You have, therefore, escaped the punishment due to cheats at cards. It is the less matter, as you are not likely to have an opportunity of making fresh victims, for the story will be known by this afternoon in every club in London. These I.O.U.'s will be of no use to you—they are not worth the paper on which they are written. However, I shall take it upon myself to hand them back to Mr. Cotter, to prevent the possibility of their getting into other hands and giving him trouble. You can unlock those handcuffs, constable; these men are at liberty to go, and if they will take my advice they will lose no time in crossing the water and establishing themselves somewhere where their talents are likely to be better appreciated than they are here. They can go; one of

you can call a hackney coach for them if they wish it. They will scarcely care to walk with their garments in their present condition."

Then the chief went into the next room.

"There is an end of that affair, Mr. Cotter. Here are the I.O.U.'s you gave to those two swindlers. Those you gave to the other three men, who were no doubt their confederates, have been torn up by them in my presence. They declare that after seeing how shamefully you had been victimised they had not the slightest idea of ever presenting them."

"I am sure that I am extremely grateful to you," Cotter said. "I know that I have behaved like a madman, and that I don't deserve to have got off as I have done. It will be a lesson to me for life, I can assure you."



CHAPTER XIII.

AT seven o'clock in the evening Philip Cotter called at Mark's lodgings, accompanied by his father, who, as he came in with him, advanced at once to Mark and shook him warmly by the hand.

"My son has told me everything, Mr. Thorndyke," he said, "and I cannot thank you sufficiently for the noble part you took in rescuing him from the terrible effects of his folly. I have been down here twice this afternoon, for I felt that I could not rest until I had shaken you by the hand. It is not the question of money so much, though that would have been a serious loss to me, but it is the saving of my son's life, and the saving of the honour of our name."

"I am glad, indeed, to have been of service, Mr. Cotter, and I trust that you have consented to forgive the folly that he has committed, and which I feel sure will never be repeated."

"Yes. It was a heavy blow to me, Mr. Thorndyke, when Philip told me; but as he has sworn most sol-

emply never to touch a card again, and as I feel sure that the lesson cannot but be a useful one to him all his life, I have agreed to say no more about it, and let the matter drop altogether. He has been fortunate to have escaped so easily. He told me of the noble offer you had made : to pay his losses if, on proceeding two or three nights longer on his mad course, you should not be able to prove that he was being cheated."

"I was not committing myself heavily," Mark said, with a smile. "I had seen enough to be absolutely certain, and was sure that I should be able to bring it home to them."

"Well, sir, you have, at any rate, laid us both under the deepest obligation. Is there any possible way in which we can show our gratitude?"

Mark thought for a moment.

"In one way you might do me a favour, Mr. Cotter. A ward of my father's, who will inherit some property when she comes of age, is at present finishing her education in town, and is living with a lady who has been her friend and companion since childhood. I have a good many acquaintances, but they are all bachelors ; and, having been living down at my father's place, near Reigate, for so many years, the ladies have no acquaintances in London. They live at Islington, and their life is a very dull one. I am anxious, for several reasons, that the young lady should have the advantage of going somewhat into society. Hitherto I have had no means of introducing her. If it is not too much to ask, Mr. Cotter, I should be extremely glad and obliged if Mrs. Cotter would call on them and give them an introduc-

tion into society. The lady with my father's ward is the widow of a captain in the Indian army, and is in all ways a very charming person, and has been at the head of my father's establishment for the last twelve years."

"With the greatest pleasure in the world, Mr. Thorn-dyke. I am only sorry that it is so slight a thing that you ask of me. I have thought it but right to tell my wife what has passed, and I had difficulty in persuading her not to come with me this evening to also express her gratitude to you. She will be pleased, indeed, to call upon your friends at once, and I am sure she will do so to-morrow. I was going to ask you to dine with us, and I hope that you will do so. We shall have no one else, and I hope that you will be able to arrange to meet your friends at our house a few days later."

The next morning Mark called on Mrs. Cunningham.

"I think you will have a visitor to-day," he said. "It has happened that I have been able to do a service to the son of Mr. Cotter, a wealthy banker. I am going to dine there this evening. He asked me about my friends in London, and I mentioned that my only lady friends were you and Millicent. He asked a few questions as to where you were living and so on, and said that his wife would have much pleasure in calling and introducing Millicent into society. As your life is very dull here, and it is clearly very desirable that Millicent should go into society, I gladly accepted the offer, and I believe that she will call to-day."

"That will be very nice, indeed, Mark. Millicent is not complaining, but she must have felt it very dull. I

have even felt it so myself, after the cheerful society we had at home."

"I don't know that I shall like it," Millicent said, doubtfully.

"Oh, yes, you will, Millicent ; and, besides, it will be good for you. It is not natural for a girl of your age to be here without friends, and I shall be very glad to know that you are going to mix a little with other people."

Mrs. Cotter called that afternoon, and three days later Mark met Mrs. Cunningham and Millicent at a dinner party at the banker's, and Mrs. Cotter introduced them very warmly to several of her friends, with the result that in a very short time they were frequently invited out, while they became very intimate with the banker and his wife, and often spent the day there.

Some little time after this Mark was entrusted by his chief with the work of discovering a man who had committed a very atrocious murder, and was, it was tolerably certain, hiding in the slums of Westminster. It was the first business of the kind that had been confided to him, and he was exceedingly anxious to carry it out successfully. He dressed himself as a hawker and took a small lodging in one of the lanes, being away the greater portion of the day ostensibly on his business, and of an evening dropping into some of the worst public-houses in the neighbourhood. He was at first viewed with some suspicion, but it was not long before he became popular. He let it be understood that he had got into trouble down in the country, and that he was quite ready to take part in any job that promised to be profitable. But he princi-

pally owed his popularity to the fact that the bully of the locality picked a quarrel with him, and, to the astonishment of those present, Mark invited him to go outside.

"You had better make it up with him, mate," a man sitting by his side whispered. "He was in the prize-ring at one time, and thrashed big Mike Hartley at Kennington. He had to give it up owing to having fought a cross. He would kill you in five minutes."

"I will chance that," Mark said, quietly, as he moved towards the door. "I don't think that he is stronger than I am, and I can use my fists a bit, too."

By the time they had taken off their upper garments a crowd had assembled. The news that a hawker was going to stand up against Black Jim circulated rapidly and caused intense excitement. To the astonishment of the spectators, the bully from the first had not a shadow of a chance, and at the end of the third round was carried away senseless, while the hawker had not received a scratch. A few days later, Mark, who, on the strength of his prowess, had had two or three hints that he could be put up to a good thing if he was inclined to join, was going down to Westminster when two men stopped and looked after him.

"I tell you, Emerson, that is the fellow. I could swear to him anywhere. What he is got up like that for, I cannot tell you, but I should not be surprised if he is one of that Bow Street gang. He called himself Mark Thorndyke, and Chetwynd said that he was a gentleman of property, but that might have been part of the plan to catch us. I have never been able to understand how a raw countryman could have caught you palming

that card. I believe the fellow is a Bow Street runner ; if so, it is rum if we cannot manage to get even with him before we go. It seemed to me that luck had deserted us altogether ; but this looks as if it was going to turn again. Let's go after him."

Keeping some fifty yards behind him they watched Mark to his lodgings, waited until he came out again, and followed him to a public-house.

"He is acting as a detective, sure enough," Emerson said. "The question is, what are we to do next?"

In half an hour Mark came out again. Several people nodded to him as he passed them, but they saw a big man, who happened to be standing under a lamp, turn his back suddenly as Mark approached him, and, after he had passed, stand scowling after him and muttering deep curses. Flash at once went up to him.

"Do you know who that fellow is, my man?"

The fellow turned savagely upon him.

"I don't know who he is, but what is that to you?"

"He is not a friend of ours," Flash said, quietly ; "quite the contrary. We have known him when he was not got up like this, and we are rather curious to know what he is doing here."

"Do you mean that?"

"I do ; I owe the fellow a grudge."

"So do I," the man growled. "Just step up this next turning ; there won't be anyone about there. Now, then, what do yer want to know?"

"I want to know who he is."

"Well, he calls himself a hawker ; but my idea of him is he is one of the fancy, perhaps a west country-

man who is keeping dark here till he can get a match on. I have been a prize-fighter myself, but he knocked me out in three rounds the other day."

"Well, the last time I saw him," Flash said, "he was dressed as a swell. My idea of him is, he is a Bow Street runner, and is got up like this to lay his hands on some of the fellows down here."

"You don't mean it," the man said, with a deep oath. "Then I can tell you he has come to the wrong shop. I have only got to whisper it about, and his life would not be worth an hour's purchase. I had meant to stick a knife in him on the first opportunity, but this will save me the trouble."

"Well, you can have your revenge and five guineas besides," Flash said. "But we must be there at the time. I should like him to know that I was at the bottom of his being caught."

They stood talking together for a few minutes and then separated, Flash and his companion going back to a quiet lodging they had taken until they could finish their arrangements for disposing of their furniture and belongings before going abroad, while at the same time they finished plucking a country greenhorn they had met at a coffee-house. Two days later, wrapped up in great-coats and with rough caps pulled down over their eyes, they entered the thieves' resort half an hour before Mark's usual time of getting there. A larger number of men than usual were assembled, and among them was Black Jim. The men were all talking excitedly, and were evidently furious at the news that the pugilist had just told them.

"Those are the gents that have given me the office," he said, as Flash and his companion entered. "They can tell yer he is one of that cursed Bow Street lot."

"That is right enough, my men," Flash said. "He and four of his mates broke into a place where we were having a bit of play, three weeks since, marched us all away to Bow Street, and shut the place up. I don't know what he is down here for, but you may be sure that it's for no good to some of you. We owe him a heavy one ourselves. He came spying on us dressed up as a swell and spoilt our game, and got the darbies put on us, and we have sworn to get even with him."

"You will get even, don't you fear," one of the men growled, "and more than even, strike me blind if you don't."

"Look here, lads," Flash said. "There is one thing I say,—don't use your knives on him ; remember he is a runner, and no doubt his chief knows all that he is doing, and no doubt ordered him to come here. There will be a big search, you may be sure, when he don't turn up to make his report. So don't let's have any bloodshed. Let the thing be done quietly."

"We can chuck his body into the river," one said.

"Yes ; but if it is picked up with half a dozen holes in it, you may be sure that they will be down here, and like enough every man who has used this place will be arrested ; you know that when there are twenty men the chances are that one will slip his neck out of the halter by turning king's evidence."

An angry growl went round the room.

"Well, you know well enough it is so—it is always

the case ; besides we ought to give him a little time to prepare himself. My idea is that the best plan will be to bind and gag him first, then we can hold a little court over him and let him know what is coming. An hour later, when the place gets a bit quiet, we can carry him down to the river,—it is not above fifty yards away,—tie a heavy weight round his neck, cut his cords the last thing, and chuck him over ; if his body is found, it will be thought it is that of some chap tired of life who took pains to drown himself pretty quickly, and there won't be any fuss over him, and there will be nothing to come upon any of you fellows for."

There was a general murmur of assent. Several of those present had already committed themselves to some extent with the supposed hawker, and were as eager as Flash himself that he should be killed ; still, all felt that it was as well that it should be managed with the least possible risk of discovery, for while an ordinary man could be put out of the way without any trouble arising, the fact that he was a Bow Street runner added enormously to the risk of the discovery of his fate.

There was a little talk and then two of the men went out and brought back a couple of strong-ropes. A few minutes after their return, Mark Thorndyke came in. He paused as he entered the room in surprise at the silence that reigned, for he was accustomed to be greeted with friendly exclamations. However, as he walked in, the door closed, and then, suddenly, with shouts of "Down with the spy," the men sprang from their seats and made a sudden rush at him. For a minute the struggle was tremendous: man after man

went down under Mark's blows, others clung on to him from behind, a rope was passed round his legs and pulled, and he fell down with a crash, bringing down five or six of his assailants; a minute later he was gagged and bound.

While the struggle was going on, no one noticed that a Lascar's face was pressed against the window; it disappeared as soon as Mark fell, and ten minutes later a dark-faced sailor ran into Gibbons's. It was a quiet evening at Ingleston's, and Gibbons, after smoking a pipe with half a dozen of the pugilists, had just returned.

"Hallo," he said, as he opened the door, "what the deuce do you want?"

The man was for a moment too breathless to answer.

"You know Mr. Thorndyke?" he said, at last, in very fair English.

"Yes, I know him. Well, what of him?"

"He has been attacked by a number of thieves in a public-house near the river at Westminster, and he will be murdered unless you go with others to help him."

"What the deuce was he doing there?" Gibbons muttered, and then, seizing his cap, said to the Lascar, "Come along with me; it ain't likely that we shall be in time, but we will try anyhow."

He ran to Ingleston's.

"Come along, Ingleston," he exclaimed, "and all of you. You all know Mr. Thorndyke. This man says he has been attacked by a gang down at Westminster, and will be murdered. I am afraid we shan't be in time, but it is worth trying."

The prize-fighters all leapt to their feet. Mark had

sparred with several of them, and, being open-handed and friendly, was generally liked. In a moment, headed by Ingleston and Gibbons, they started at the top of their speed, and in less than a quarter of an hour were at bank-side.

"That is the house," the sailor said, pointing to the public, where a red blind had been lowered at the window, and two men lounged outside the door to tell any chance customer that might come along he was not wanted there at present.

Inside a mock trial had been going on, and Mark had been sentenced to death as a spy, not a voice being raised in his defence. As soon as he had been lifted up and seated so that he could see the faces of those present, he recognized the two gamblers, and saw at once that his fate was sealed. Even had they not been there, the chance of escape would have been small. The fact that one of the detectives had been caught under circumstances when there was but slight chance of its ever being known how he came to his end was, in itself, sufficient to doom him. Several of the men present had taken him into their confidence, and he had encouraged them to do so ; not that he wanted to entrap them or that he intended to do so, but in order to obtain a clue through them as to the hiding-place of the man he was in search of.

The savage exultation on the faces of the two gamblers, however, was sufficient to extinguish any ray of hope. He felt sure at once that they had been the authors of his seizure, and that no thought of mercy would enter the minds of these two scoundrels whose

plans he had frustrated, whose position he had demolished, and to whom he had caused the loss of a large sum of money. Neither Flash nor Emerson would have taken share in a crime known to so many had they not been on the point of leaving England. Their names were known to no one there, and even should some of these afterwards peach, they would at least be safe. Mark had been asked whether he could deny that he was a member of the detective force, and had shaken his head. Even if he had told a lie, which he would not do, the lie would have been a useless one. No one would have believed it, for the two gamblers would have been witnesses that he was so.

He had been placed in one corner of the room so that what light there was would not fall on his face, and had anyone entered they would not have noticed that he was gagged. One, indeed, had suggested that it would be better to lay him under one of the benches, but Black Jim said, with a brutal laugh,—

“No, no ; it is better that we should keep sight of him, and if anyone asks a question, of course we can say that the gentleman has the toothache.”

Presently Flash spoke to the ruffian in a low voice.

“Yes, I think you are right,” he replied. “Look here,” he went on, raising his voice, “there is no occasion to have such a lot in this business ; Jake Watson, Bill the Tinker, and me are quite enough to carry him to his bed. I reckon the rest had better make themselves scarce when the time comes, go home, and keep their mouths shut. I need not say that anyone who lets his tongue wag about it is likely to come to a worse end

than this bloodhound. We will have another glass of grog before you turn out ; the streets won't be quiet for another hour yet, and there is another guinea of this worthy hawker's to be spent. Summers, make another big bowl of punch. Don't put so much water in it as you did in the last."

The landlord, a notorious ruffian, was just coming into the room with a huge bowl when there was the sound of a scuffle outside.

"You had better see what is up," Black Jim said, and two of the men nearest the door unbarred and opened it. As they did so there was a rush, and eight powerful men ran in, knocking to the floor those who had opened the door. The rest sprang to their feet ; Gibbons looked round, and as his eye fell upon Mark, who had, the moment the men inside rose, got into a standing position, Gibbons launched himself towards him, striking four of the ruffians who endeavoured to stop him to the ground with his crushing blows.

"This way," he shouted to his friends. "Ingleston and Tring, do you keep the door."

The moment the six men had closed round Mark, one of them taking out his knife, cut the cords, removed the bandage from his mouth, and extricated the gag. The name of the two prize-fighters had created something like a panic among the crowd, which had increased when one of them shouted, "It is Charley Gibbons." Flash and Emerson sprung to their feet with the rest, and the latter shouted, "Go at them, men, there are only eight of them, and we are twenty ; knife them, or you will all hang for this job."

The knowledge of their danger was evident to all the men, and, nerved by desperation, they rushed at the prize-fighters, but the eight were now nine, and each of them in a fray of this kind was equal to half a dozen ordinary men. Scarce a word was spoken, but the sound of crushing blows and scuffling, and an occasional oath made a confused din in the half-lighted room. Mark burst his way through his assailants to the spot where Flash and Emerson were standing, somewhat in the rear of the crowd, for they had been sitting at the other end of the room. Flash had a pistol in his hand, but the man who was standing in front of him was struck with such violence that he fell backwards, knocking Emerson to the ground, and almost upsetting Flash, and before the latter could steady himself Mark struck him with all his force under the chin. A moment later the landlord blew out the two candles, and in the darkness the ruffians made a dash for the door, carried Tring and Ingleston off their feet, and rushed out into the lane.

"If the man who blew out those candles don't light them again at once," Gibbons shouted, "I, Charley Gibbons, tell him that I will smash him and burn this place over his head ; he had best be quick about it."

The landlord, cowed with the threat, soon returned with a candle from the kitchen, and lit those that he had extinguished.

"Well Mr. Thorndyke, we just arrived in time, I fancy," Gibbons said.

"You have saved my life, Gibbons—you and the others. How you got to know that I was here I cannot imagine, but I should have been a dead man in another

half-hour, if you had not arrived. I thank you all from the bottom of my heart."

"That is all right, sir," Gibbons said. "It is a pleasure to give such scoundrels as these a lesson. Is anyone hurt? I fancy I have got a scratch or two."

Several of the men had been cut with knives, but the blows had been given so hurriedly that no one was seriously injured. Twelve men lay on the ground.

"Now, sir, what shall we do with these fellows?"

"I should say we had better leave them alone, Gibbons. I don't want any row over the affair. It is the work of these two fellows here. I think I pretty well settled one of them."

Gibbons stooped over Flash.

"You have broken his jaw, sir; but he will come round in time. I believe this other fellow is only shamming. I don't see any of our handiwork upon his face. The others have all got as much as they want, I think." And taking a candle he looked at their faces. "There is not one of them who will want to show up for a week or so," he said, "and there are two or three will carry the marks to their graves. Well, sir, if you don't want anything done to them, the sooner we are off the better. Those fellows who got away may bring a lot of others down upon us. As long as it is only fists, we could march through Westminster; but as they would have knives, it is just as well to get out of it before there is any trouble. You are got up in a rum way, Mr. Thorndyke."

"Yes; I will tell you about it afterwards. I agree with you that we had best be moving at once."

But the men who had fled were too glad to have made their escape to think of anything but to make for their dens as quickly as possible, and the party passed through the lanes into the open space in front of Parliament House without interruption.

"We will go up to your place, Ingleston, and talk it over there," Mark said. "You can get those cuts bound up, and I shall be very glad to get a drink. That thing they shoved into my mouth hurt my tongue a good deal, and I have not gone through a pleasant half-hour I can tell you."

He walked up past Whitehall with Gibbons and Ingleston, the others going in pairs so as not to attract attention. As soon as they reached Ingleston's place, the latter told the man in the bar to put the shutters up, led the way into the bar parlour, and mixed a large bowl of punch.

"Now, Gibbons, in the first place," Mark said, after quenching his thirst, "how did you know of my being in danger?"

"Well sir, a black sailor chap ran into my place suddenly and told me."

"Do you mean a coloured man, Gibbons?"

"Yes, sir, one of those Lascar chaps you see about the docks. I did not ask any questions, but ran as hard as I could. I had only left here five minutes before, and knew that Tring and some of the others would still be here. They did not lose a moment, and off we went. The sailor chap he kept ahead. I tried to come up to him two or three times to get to know something about it, but he always seemed to quicken

his pace when I was coming up, and I soon got too blown to want to do much talking. He led us to the door, and after that I saw nothing more of him. What became of him I don't know. I expect he was better at running than he was at fighting."

"It is curious," Mark said, thoughtfully. "He might have been in the place when I went in, and slipped out while I was making a fight for it. I have seen a Lascar several times while I have been down there. I daresay it was the same man, though why he should take such trouble for the sake of a stranger I don't know. There seems to be a good many of them about, for, now I think of it, I have run against them several times wherever I have been in town."

"Now, sir, what did they want to kill you for?"

"Well, Gibbons, it happened in this way. My father, you know, was murdered by a man who had a grudge against him and who is both a highwayman and a house-breaker."

"They don't often go together," Ingleston said. "The highwaymen generally look down upon the burglars, and keep themselves to themselves."

"I know they do, Ingleston; but this fellow has been a convict, and is not particular what he turns his hand to. The detectives have been after him for a long time, but have failed, and I determined to take the matter up myself, and ever since I have been up here I have been hunting about in the worst quarters of the town. The people of Bow Street have aided me in every way they could, and I suppose some of these men have seen me go in or out of the place. Of course,

when I am going into these bad quarters I put on a disguise, and manage to get in with some of these thieves, and so to try to get news of him through them. Three weeks ago I decided to try Westminster. I was getting on uncommonly well there, principally because I gave a tremendous thrashing to a fellow they call Black Jim. He has been a prize-fighter."

"I know him," Tring said: "it was the fellow that was kicked out for selling a fight. He was not a bad man with his fists, either; but I expect you astonished him, Mr. Thorndyke."

"Yes, I knocked him out of time in three rounds. Well, he has been a bully down there, and everyone was very glad that he was taken down. After that I got to know several of the worst lot down there. They fancied that I was one of themselves, and several of them made proposals to me to join them, and of course I encouraged the idea in hopes of coming upon the man that I was after. Then some fellow in the street recognised me, I suppose, and denounced me to the rest as being one of the runners. I suppose he told them this evening, before I went in.

"The place was a regular thieves' den, which, of course, was why I went there. Naturally they were furious, especially those who had been proposing to me to join them. Anyhow, they had evidently settled among themselves that I was to be put out of the way, and directly I went in I was attacked. I knocked down a few of them, but they jumped on my back, and one of them managed to get a rope round my legs, and down I went with three or four of them, and before I could get

up again they had tied and gagged me. Then they held a sort of court. Man after man got up and said that I had been drawing them on to find out what they were up to, and had agreed to join them, of course with the intention of getting them caught in the act, and two got up and said that they knew me as one of the runners. They all agreed that I must be put out of the way.

"I suppose, as the landlord did not want blood spilt in his house, they did not knife me at once ; however, they told me that they had decided that as soon as the coast was clear I should be carried down to the river and chucked in with an old anchor tied to my neck. I had just a gleam of hope a short time before you came in, for then it had been settled that it was just as well no more should be engaged in the affair than was necessary, and that Black Jim, with two others, whom I had been talking to, and the two men who had told them that I was a runner, should manage it, and the rest were to go off to their homes.

"I had been all the time trying to loosen my ropes, and had got one of my hands nearly free, and I thought that if they waited another half-hour I might have got them both free, and been able to make a bit of a fight of it, though I had very little hope of getting my legs free. *

"However, I had my eye on the knife of the man who was sitting next to me, and who was one of those who was to stay. I thought that if I had my hands free I could snatch his knife, settle him, and then cut the ropes from my legs ; that done, I could, I think, have managed Black Jim and the others. As for the men who

denounced me, they were small men, and I had no fear of them in a fight, unless, as I thought likely enough, they might have pistols. One of them is the fellow whose jaw I broke ; I hit him hard, for he had a pistol in his hand."

"There is no doubt you hit him hard," Gibbons said, drily. "He looked a better sort than the rest."

"Yes ; the fellow was a card-sharper whom I once detected at cheating ; and so was the one who was lying next to him, the man whom you said you thought was shamming."

By this time the men's wounds were all bandaged up. Mark told them that he would be round there again in the morning, and hoped that they would all be there.

"I shall go home at once and turn in," he said. "Straining at those cords has taken the skin off my wrists, and I feel stiff all over. It will be a day or two, Gibbons, before I am able to put on the gloves again. I wish I could find that Lascar. I owe him a heavy debt."

As Mark made his way home he thought a good deal about the coloured sailor. If the man had been in the den, the ruffians would hardly have ventured to attack him in the presence of a stranger. Of course, he might have been passing, and have seen the fray through the window, but in that case he would run to the nearest constable. How could he know anything about his habits, and why should he have gone to Gibbons for assistance ? That, and the fact that he had so often observed Lascars in the places he had gone to, certainly looked as if he had been watched, and, if so, it

could only be connected with those diamonds. It was a curious thing altogether.

The next morning he went early to Bow Street. As soon as the chief came he related the events of the previous evening, and told him that it was Flash and Emerson who had denounced him.

"I know the place," the officer said. "It is one of the worst thieves' dens in London. However, it is just as well you decided not to take any steps. Of course, all the fellows would have sworn that they did not intend to do you any harm, but that Flash had put them up to frightening you, and I doubt whether any jury would have convicted. As to the other men, we know that they are all thieves and some of them worse, but the mere fact that they proposed to you to join them in their crimes won't do, as no actual crime was committed. However, I shall have the gang closely watched, and, at any rate, you had better leave Westminster alone; someone else must take up the work of looking for that man you were on the watch for. Anyhow, you had best take a week's rest; there is no doubt you have had a very narrow escape. It is strange about that Lascar; he might not have cared for going to take part in the fray, but you would have thought that he would have waited outside to get a reward for bringing those men to your rescue."

As Mark did not care to tell about the diamonds till the time came for getting them, he made no reply beyond expressing an agreement with the chief's surprise at the man not having remained to the end of the fray. On leaving Bow Street he went up to Ingleston's. The

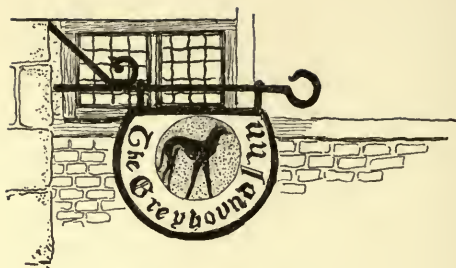
men who had rescued him the night before were gathered there, and he presented each of them with a cheque for twenty-five guineas.

"I know very well," he said, "that you had no thought of reward when you hurried down to save me, but that is no reason why I should not show my gratitude to you for the service you have rendered me. Some of you might very well have been seriously hurt, if not killed, by their knives. At any rate, I insist upon your taking it. Money is always useful, you know, and it is not often so well earned as this."

The men were greatly pleased, and Tring said,—

"Well, sir, if you get into another scrape you may be sure that you can count upon us."

"I shall try and not get into any more," Mark laughed. "This has been a good deal more serious than I had bargained for, and I shall be very careful in the future."



CHAPTER XIV.

“THE burglary season seems to have recommenced in earnest,” Mark’s chief said, some nine months after he had been at work. “For a time there has been a lull, as you know, but I have had three reports this week, and it strikes me that they are by the same hand as before ; of course, I may be mistaken, but they are done in a similar way, the only difference being that there is ground for believing that only one man is engaged in them. I fancy the fellow that you are after has either been away from London for some time or has been keeping very quiet. At any rate, we have every ground for believing that he keeps himself aloof from London thieves, which is what I should expect from such a man. If one has nerve enough to do it, there is nothing like working singly ; when two or three men are engaged, there is always the risk of one being caught and turning queen’s evidence, or of there being a quarrel and of his peaching in revenge.

“If your man has been away from town, he has cer-

tainly not been working any one district ; of course, one gets the usual number of reports from different quarters, but, although burglaries are frequent enough, there has been no complaint of a sudden increase of such crimes, as there would have been, judging from the numerous daring attempts here, had Bastow been concerned ; therefore I feel sure he has been living quietly. He would have his mate's share—that man you shot, you know—of the plunder they made together ; he would know that after that affair at your place there would be a vigilant hunt for him, and it is likely enough that he has retired altogether from business for a time.

“However, men of that sort can never stand a quiet life long, and are sure sooner or later to take to their trade again, if only for the sake of its excitement. Now that the burglaries have begun again, I shall be glad if you will devote yourself entirely to this business. You have served a good apprenticeship, and, for our sake as well as yours, I should be glad for you to have it in hand.”

“I shall be very pleased to do so, sir. Although we do not know where he is to be found, I think I can say that it is not in the slums of London. It seems to me that he may be quietly settled as an eminently respectable man almost under our noses. He may show himself occasionally at fashionable resorts, and may be a regular attendant at horse-races. He would not run any appreciable risk in doing so, for his face is quite unknown to anyone except the constables who were present at his trial ; and even these would scarcely be likely to recognise him, for he was then but eighteen, while he is

now six- or seven-and-twenty, and no doubt the life he has led must have changed him greatly."

"I quite agree with you," the chief said. "After the first hunt for him was over, he might do almost anything without running much risk. Well, I put the matter in your hands, and leave it to you to work out in your own way. You have given ample proof of your shrewdness and pluck, and in this case especially I know that you will do everything that is possible. Of course, you will be relieved of all other duties, and if it takes you months before you can lay hands upon him, we shall consider it time well spent if you succeed at last. From time to time change your quarters, but let me know your address, so that, should I learn anything that may be useful, I can communicate with you at once. You had better take another name than that by which you are known in the force. I shall be glad if, after thinking the matter over, you will write me a few lines stating what you propose to do in the first place."

Mark went to his lodgings and sat there for some time thinking matters over. His first thought was to attend the races for a time, but owing to the number of people there, and his own ignorance of Bastow's appearance, he abandoned that idea, and determined to try a slower but more methodical plan. Coming to that conclusion, he put on his hat and made his way to Mrs. Cunningham's.

"Well, Mr. Constable," Millicent said, saucily, as he entered, "any fresh captures?"

"No, I think that I have for the present done with that sort of thing; I have served my apprenticeship, and am now setting up on my own account."

"How is that, Mark?"

"There is reason to believe that Bastow has begun his work again near London. As I have told you, it is absolutely certain that he is not hiding in any of the places frequented by criminals here, and there is every reason for supposing that he has been leading a quiet life somewhere, or that he has been away in the country. As long as that was the case, there was nothing to be done ; but now that he seems to have set to work again, it is time for me to be on the move. I have seen the chief this morning, and he has released me from all other duty and given me *carte blanche* to work in my own way."

"Then why don't you leave the force altogether, Mark? You know that I have always thought it hateful that you should be working under orders, like any other constable."

"Of course, women don't like to be under orders Millicent ; but men are not so independent, and are quite content to obey those who are well qualified to give orders. I have had a very interesting time of it."

"Very interesting!" she said, scornfully. "You have been nearly killed or shot half a dozen times ; you have been obliged to wear all sorts of dirty clothes, to sleep in places where one would not put a dog, and generally to do all sorts of things altogether unbecoming in your position."

"My dear, I have no particular position," he laughed, and then went on more seriously : "My one position at present is that of avenger of my father's murder, and nothing that can assist me in the task is unbecoming to

me ; but, as I said, it has been interesting, I may almost say fascinating work. I used to be fond of hunting, but I can tell you that it is infinitely more exciting to hunt a man than it is to hunt a fox. You are your own hound, you have to pick up the scent, to follow it up, however much the quarry may wind and double, and when at last you lay your hand upon his shoulder and say, 'In the king's name,' there is an infinitely keener pleasure than there is when the hounds run down the fox. One sport is perhaps as dangerous as the other : in the one case your horse may fail at a leap and you may break your neck, in the other you may get a bullet in your head ; so in that respect there is not much to choose between man-hunting and fox-hunting. There is the advantage, though, that in the one you have to depend upon your horse's strength, and in the other on your own courage."

"I know that you are an enthusiast over it, Mark, and I can fancy that if I were a big, strong man, as you are, I might do the same ; but if you are going now to try by yourself, why should you not leave the force altogether?"

"Because, in the first place, I shall get all the information they obtain, and can send for any assistance that I may require. In the next place, by showing this little staff with its silver crown, I show that I am a Bow Street runner, and can obtain information at once from all sorts of people which I could not get without its aid."

"Well, I won't say anything more against it, Mark. How are you going to begin?"

"I mean to go the round of all the places near London, say within ten miles. I shall stay from a week to

a fortnight in each, take a quiet lodging, give out that I am on the lookout for a small house with a garden, and get to talk with people of all kinds."

"But I cannot see what you have to enquire for."

"I imagine that Bastow will have taken just the sort of house that I am enquiring for, and in the course of my questions I may hear of someone living in just that sort of way,—a retired life, not making many friends, riding up to London sometimes, and keeping, perhaps, a deaf old woman as a servant, or perhaps a deaf old man; someone, you see, who would not be likely to hear him if he came home in the middle of the night, or in the early morning. Once I hear of such a man, I should ascertain his age, and whether generally he agreed in appearance with what Bastow is likely to be by this time; then get down one of the constables who was at the trial, and take his opinion on the subject, after which we should only have to watch the house at night and pounce upon him as he came back from one of his excursions. That is the broad outline of my plan. I cannot help thinking that in the long run I shall be able to trace him, and of course it will make it all the easier if he takes to stopping coaches or committing murderous burglaries."

"Then I suppose we are not going to see you often, Mark?"

"Well, not so often as you have done, Millicent, for some time, at any rate. I shall not be more than five or six miles away, and I shall often ride into town for the evening, and return late with some sort of hope that I may be stopped on the road again; it would save me a

world of trouble, you see, if he would come to me instead of my having to find him."

"Which side of London are you going to try first?"

"The south side, certainly; there are a score of places that would be convenient to him,—Dulwich, Clapham, Tooting, Wimbledon, Stockwell; the list is a long one. I should say Wimbledon was about the most distant, and I should think that he would not go so far as that; if he only acts as a highwayman he might be as far off as Epsom; but if he is really the man concerned in these burglaries he must be but a short distance away. He would hardly risk having to ride very far with the chance of coming upon the patrols. I think that I shall begin at Peckham; that is a central sort of position, and from there I shall work gradually west; before I do so, perhaps I shall try Lewisham. He is likely, in any case, to be quite on the outskirts of any village he may have settled in, in order that he may ride in and out at any hour without his coming and going being noticed."

"You certainly seem to have thought it over in all ways, Mark; you almost infect me with your ardour, and make me wish that I were a man and could help you."

"You are much nicer as you are, Millicent."

The girl tossed her head in disdain at the compliment.

"It is all very well, Mark," she went on, ignoring his speech, "but it seems to me that, in finding out things, a woman would be able to do just as much as a man; she can gossip with her neighbours and ask about

everyone in a place quite as well, if not better, than a man."

"Yes, I don't doubt that," Mark laughed, "and if I want your aid I shall have no hesitation in asking for it. Until then I hope you will go on with your painting and harping, steadily, like a good little girl."

"I am nearly eighteen, sir, and I object to be called a good little girl."

"Well, if I were to say a good young woman, you would not like it."

"No, I don't think I should. I don't know why, but when anyone says a girl is a good young woman or a nice young woman, there always seems something derogatory about it; it is almost as bad as saying she is a very respectable young person, which is odious."

"Then, you see," he went on, "you are quite getting on in society; since Mr. Cotter's introduction to Mrs. Cunningham and his mother's subsequent call you have got to know a good many people and go about a good deal."

"Yes, it has been more lively of late," she admitted. "At first it was certainly monstrously dull here, and I began to think that we should have to change our plans and go down again to Weymouth, and settle there for a time. Now I am getting contented; but I admit that, even at the risk of making you conceited, we shall certainly miss you very much, as you have been very good, considering how busy you have been, to come in three or four evenings every week for a chat."

"There has been nothing very good about it, Milli-cent; it has been very pleasant to me; it is like a bit of

old times again when I am here with you two, and one seems to have left all the excitement of one's work behind as one comes in at the door."

"I wonder whether the old time will ever come back again, Mark," she said, sadly.

"It never can be quite the old time again, but when you are back at the old place it may be very near it."

She looked at him reproachfully.

"You think that I shall change my mind, Mark, but at heart you know better. The day I am one-and-twenty I hope to carry out my intentions."

"Well, as I have told you before, Millicent, I cannot control your actions, but I am at least master of my own. You can give away Crowswood to whom you like, but at least you cannot compel me to take it; make it over to one of the hospitals if you like, that is within your power, but it is not in your power to force me into the mean action of enriching myself because you have romantic notions in your mind. I should scorn myself were I capable of doing such an action. I wonder you think so meanly of me as to suppose for a moment that I would do so."

"It is a great pity my father did not leave the property outright to your father, then all this bother would have been avoided," she said, quietly. "I should still have had plenty to live upon without there being any fear of being loved merely for my money."

"It would have been the same thing if he had," Mark said, stubbornly. "My father would not have taken it, and I am sure that I should not have taken it after him."

You are his proper heiress. I don't say, if he had left a son, and that son had been a second Bastow, that one would have hesitated, for he would probably have gambled it away in a year, the tenants might have been ruined, and the village gone to the dogs. Every man has a right to disinherit an unworthy son, but that is a very different thing from disinheriting a daughter simply from a whim. Well, don't let us talk about it any more, Millicent. It is the only thing that we don't agree about, and therefore it is best left alone."

The next day Mark established himself at an inn in Peckham, and for six weeks made diligent enquiries, but without success. There were at least a dozen men who lived quietly and rode or drove to their business in town. Many of them were put aside as needing no investigation, having been residents there for years. Some of the others he saw start or return, but none of them corresponded in any way with the probable appearance of the man for whom he was in search. During this time he heard of several private coaches being held up on the road between Epsom and London, and three burglaries took place at Streatham.

He then moved to Stockwell. Before proceeding there he had his horse up again from Crowswood and rode into Stockwell from the west. He was dressed now as a small country squire, and had a valise strapped behind his saddle. The inn there was a busy one.

"I want a room," he said, as he alighted. "I shall probably stay here a few days."

Presently he had a talk with the landlord.

"I am on the lookout," he said, "for a little place near town. I have come in for a small estate in the country, but I have no taste for farming, and want to be within easy reach of town, and at the same time to have a place with a paddock where I can keep my horse and live quietly. I don't much care whether it is here or anywhere else within a few miles of town, and I intend to ride about and see if I can find a place that will suit me. I should not like to be nearer the town than this, for I have not money enough to go the pace ; still, I should like to be near enough to ride or walk in whenever I have a fancy for it."

"I understand, sir. Of course there are plenty of places round here, at Clapham and Tooting, and I may say Streatham, but most of them are a deal too large for a bachelor ; still, I have no doubt you would find a place to suit you without much difficulty. These sort of places are most in request by London tradesmen who have given up business and want to get a little way out of town and keep a gig. I should say there must be a score of such people living round here. I am often asked about such places, but I don't know of one to let just at the present moment.

"Still, there ought to be, for of late people have not cared so much to come out here ; there has been such a scare owing to highwaymen and burglars that men with wives and families don't fancy settling out of town, though there ain't much risk about it, for to every one house that is broken into there are thousands that are not, and, besides, the houses that these fellows try are large places, where there is plenty of silver plate and

a few gold watches, and perhaps some money, to be had."

Mark soon made the acquaintance of the stablemen, and a few pints of beer put them on good terms with him. Every day he took rides round the neighbourhood, going out early, stabling his horse, and after having a chat with the ostlers, strolled round the place. Clapham, Ewell, and Streatham were also visited.

"I know of a place that would just suit you," the ostler at the Greyhound at Streatham said to him, on the occasion of his third visit there, "but it is let; my old mother is the gentleman's housekeeper. He took the place through me, for he rode up just as you have done, one afternoon, nigh a year ago. He was from town, he was; he told me that he had been going the pace too hard and had to pull in, and wanted a little place where he could keep his horse and live quiet for a time. I told him of a place that I thought would suit him just outside the town, and he called in the next day and told me that he had taken it. 'Now,' he said, 'I want a woman as housekeeper; an old woman, you know. I cannot be bothered with a young 'un. If you speak to a wench she is soon fancying that you are in love with her. I want one who can cook a chop or a steak, fry me a bit of bacon, and boil an egg and keep the place tidy. I intend to look after my horse myself.'

"'Well, sir,' I said, 'there is my old mother. She is a widow, and it is as much as she can do to keep off the parish. She is reckoned a tidy cook and a good cleaner, and she could keep herself well enough if it

wasn't that she is so hard of hearing that many people don't care to employ her.'

" 'I don't care a rap about that,' he said. 'I shall not need to talk to her except to tell her what I will have for dinner, and if she is deaf she won't want to be away gossiping. Does she live near here?'

" 'She lives in the town,' I said. 'I can fetch her down in half an hour.'

" 'That will do,' says he. 'I am going to have lunch. When I have done I will come out and speak with her.'

"Well, sir, he engaged her right off, and he tipped me a guinea for finding the place for him, and there he has been ever since. It was a lucky job for mother, for she says there never was a gentleman that gave less trouble. He is a wonderful quiet man, and in general stops at home all the day smoking and reading. He has a boy come in two or three times a week to work in the garden. Sometimes of an evening he rides up to town. I expect he cannot keep away from the cards altogether."

"Is he an elderly man?" Mark asked.

"Lor', no, sir; under thirty, I should say. He is a free-handed sort of chap, and though he ain't particular about his eating, he likes a bottle of good wine, the old woman says, even if it is only with a chop. He never rides past here and I happen to be outside without tossing me a shilling to drink his health."

Mark went into the house and ordered lunch. It would not have done to have asked any more questions or to have shown any special interest in the matter, but

he felt so excited that he could not have avoided doing so had he waited longer with the ostler. After he had finished his meal he strolled out again into the stable yard.

"Well," he said to the ostler, "can't you put me up to another good thing, just as you told that gentleman you were speaking to me about?"

"There are two or three places that I know of that might suit you, sir. There is a house on the hill. I know that it has got a paddock, but I don't know how big it is; it is in general known as Hawleys, that is the name of the last people who lived there. Anyone will tell you which is the house. Then there is another place. You turn to the right the third turning on the hill; it stands by itself two or three hundred yards down; it has got a goodish bit of ground. There is only one house beyond it; that is the one where my mother lives. That was an old farm once, but this was built later. I believe the ground belonged to the farm; you will know it by a big tree in front of it; it stands back forty feet or so from the road."

"Where does the road lead to?"

"Well, sir, it ain't much of a road beyond the next house; it is only a lane, but you can get through that way into the main road, through Tooting down into Balham, and on to Wimbledon."

"I think I will go and have a look at both those places," Mark said.

"Will you take your horse, sir?"

"No, I suppose it is not much above half a mile."

"About that, sir."

"Then I will walk ; I shall not be likely to find anyone to hold my horse there."

Mark had no difficulty in finding the house. It looked as if it had been untenanted for some time, and in the window was a notice that for keys and information applications were to be made at a shop in the High Street. Well pleased to find that there was no one in the house, Mark entered the gate and passed round into what at one time had been a kitchen-garden behind it ; at the bottom of this was a field of three or four acres.

The ground was separated by a hedge from that of the next house beyond. This was fully a hundred yards away. A well-bred horse was grazing in the field ; a man smoking a pipe was watching a boy doing gardening work behind the house. Mark remained for nearly an hour concealed behind the hedge in hopes that he would come nearer. At the end of that time, however, he went into the house, and after waiting another ten minutes Mark also left, resisting the temptation to walk along the road and take a closer look at it, for he felt that such a step would be dangerous, for should the man notice anyone looking at the place his suspicions might be aroused.

It was evident that the lane was very little used ; in many cases the grass grew across it. There were marks of horse's feet, but none of wheels, and he concluded that when going up to town the man came that way and rode quietly through Streatham, for the hoof-prints all pointed in that direction, and that on his return at night he came up the lane from the other road.

"Well, master, what do you think of the houses?"

"I have only been to the one in the lane that you spoke of, for I want to get back to town. I had a good look at it, but it is rather a dreary-looking place, and evidently wants a lot of repairs before it can be made comfortable. The next time that I am down I will look at the other."

Mounting his horse, he rode at a rapid pace into London, and dismounted at Bow Street.

"You have news, I see, Mr. Thorndyke," the chief said, when he entered.

"I have, sir; I believe that I have marked the man down; at any rate, if it is not he, it is a criminal of some sort—of that I have no doubt."

"That is good news, indeed," the chief said. "Now tell me all about it."

Mark repeated the story the ostler had told him, and the result of his own observations.

"You see," he said, "the man, whether Bastow or not, has clearly taken the place for the purpose of concealment, for he can approach it by the lane, which is a very unfrequented one, on his return from his expeditions. He has taken on a deaf old woman, who will not hear him ride in at night, and will have no idea at what hours he comes home. Riding out through the main street in the afternoon he would excite no notice, and the story to the ostler would very well account for his taking the house and for his habit of coming up here of an afternoon and returning late. I thought it best to come back and tell you, and I will adopt any plan that you suggest for his capture."

"You say that he has been there for nearly a year?"

"About a year, the ostler said."

"Then one of my men, at least, must have been very careless not to have found him out long ago. Let me see." And he took down a volume of reports. "Streatham. Tomlinson has been here a fortnight making every enquiry. 'No man of suspicious appearance or of unknown antecedents here.' Humph! That is not the first time that Tomlinson has failed altogether in his duty. However, that does not matter for the moment. What is your own idea, Mr. Thorndyke?"

"My idea is that a couple of good men should go down with me to Streatham, and that we should be always on the watch in High Street until we see him ride past. Directly it is dark we will go to his house, fasten the old woman up, and search it thoroughly. If we find stolen property, so much the better; but in any case we shall wait inside the house until he returns, and as he comes in throw ourselves upon him before he has time to draw a pistol. I should say it would be as well the men should go down in a trap. There is an empty house next door, and when we go to search the place we can leave the horse and trap inside the gate. Directly we have him secure we can fetch up the trap, put him in, and one of the men and myself can drive him back here, leaving the other in charge of the house, which can then be searched again next day."

"I think that will be a very good plan, and will avoid all unnecessary fuss. I will send Malcolm and Chester down with you to-morrow. Where will you meet them?"

"I should say that they had better put up at the Greyhound. I don't suppose he will go out until six or

seven o'clock, but they had better be there earlier. One should station himself in the main street, the other concealing himself somewhere beyond the fellow's house, for it is likely enough that sometimes he may take the other way. I will go down to the Greyhound at six, and will wait there until one of them brings me the news that he has left."

"I think you had better come in in the morning, and give your instructions to the men ; there will be less fear of any mistake being made. I should say you had better come in on foot ; one can never be too careful when one is dealing with so crafty a rogue as this ; he certainly does not work with an accomplice ; but, for all that, he may have two or three sharp boys in his pay, and they may watch this place by turns and carry him news of any stir about the office."

"I will walk in," Mark replied. "It is no distance from Stockwell."

Mark slept but little that night. He had believed all along that he should be finally successful, but the discovery had come so suddenly that it had taken him completely by surprise. It might not be the man, and he tried hard to persuade himself that the chances were against his being so, so that he should not feel disappointed should it turn out that it was some other criminal, for that the man was a criminal he had not a shadow of doubt.

The next morning he was at the office early. The chief arrived half an hour later, and the two officers were at once called in.

"You will go with Mr. Thorndyke," the chief said,

"and he will give you instructions. The capture is a very important one, and there must be no mistake made. We believe the man to be Bastow. I think you were present at his trial, Chester ; he escaped from Sydney Convict Prison some three years ago, and is, I believe, the author of many of the highway robberies and burglaries that have puzzled us so. Of course, you will take fire-arms, but if he is alone you will certainly have no occasion to use them, especially as you will take him completely by surprise. You will order a gig from Morden and leave here about three o'clock. I should say you had better get up as two countrymen, who have been up to market. However, Mr. Thorndyke will explain the whole matter to you fully."

Mark then went off with the two officers to a private room, and went into the whole matter with them.

"I think, Chester," he said, "that you had better watch in the High Street, because you know the man. At least, you have seen him, and may recognise him again."

"I think I should know him, however much he has changed. I took particular notice of him at the trial, and thought what a hardened-looking scamp he was. It is very seldom I forget a face when I once have a good look at it, and I don't think I am likely to forget his."

"Malcolm, I think you cannot do better than take your place in the garden of the house next to his ; it is a place that has stood empty for many months, and there is no chance of anyone seeing you. His paddock comes up to the garden, and you can, by placing yourself in the corner, see him as he comes out into the

lane. As soon as you see that he has gone, come back to the Greyhound with the news. I shall be there, and you will pick up Chester in the High Street as you come along ; of course you won't pretend to know me, but the mere fact of your coming back will be enough to tell me that he has gone. As soon as it gets dark you will pay your reckoning and drive off in the gig ; lead it into the drive in front of the house this side of his. I shall have strolled off before, and shall be waiting for you there. If he does not come out by ten o'clock, we can give it up for to-night. You had better say that you have changed your mind and will take beds at the Greyhound ; and the next morning drive off in your gig and put up again at the inn at the other end of the town, the White Horse. I will come over again at two o'clock in the afternoon. You will bring handcuffs, and you had better also bring a stout rope to tie him with."

When every detail had been arranged Mark strolled to Dick Chetwynd's lodgings.

"Well, Mark, what has become of you? I have not seen you for the last two months, and I hear that you have not been near Ingleston's crib since I saw you."

"No, I have been away on business. You know I told you that I was spending much of my time in endeavouring to hunt down my father's murderer. I can tell you now that I have been working all the time with the Bow Street people, and I think I know every thieves' slum in London as well as any constable in the town."

"You don't say so, Mark. Well, I should not like such work as that. The prize-fighters are a pretty

rough lot, but to go to such dens as those is enough to make one shudder. But that does not explain where you have been now."

"No. Well, having persuaded myself at last that his head-quarters were not in town, I have been trying the villages round, and I believe that I have laid my hands on him at last."

"You don't say so, Mark. Well, I congratulate you heartily, both on your having caught the fellow and for having got rid of such horrid work. Where is he? Have you got him lodged in gaol?"

"No, we are going to capture him to-night; or if not to-night, to-morrow night. Two of the Bow Street officers are going down with me, and we shall have him as he comes home from one of his expeditions either on the highway or as a housebreaker. If he does not go this evening we shall wait until to-morrow, but, at any rate, the first time that he goes out we shall have him."

"I have got a special engagement for this evening, Mark, or I would offer to go with you and lend you a hand, if necessary."

"There is no occasion for that, Dick. We shall take the fellow by surprise as he goes into his own house, and have him handcuffed before he can draw a pistol. Then, when we have got him fairly tied up, we shall put him into a light cart that we shall have handy and bring him straight to Bow Street. To tell you the truth, I am so excited over the thought that I do not know how I should have got through the day if I had not come in to have a chat with you."

"I can quite understand that, old fellow. Well, the best thing we can do is to take a stroll out and look at the fashions. It is early yet, but just at present it is all the rage to turn out early. It will do me good too, for I was at Ingleston's last night, and the smoke and row has given me a headache. I shall really have to give up going there, except when there is an important fight on. It is too much to stand, and the tobacco is so bad that I am obliged to keep a suit of clothes for the purpose. Let us be off at once."



CHAPTER XV.

AT four o'clock Mark put up his horse at the Greyhound, and chatted for a quarter of an hour with the ostler, who had been making enquiries, and had heard of one or two other houses in the neighbourhood which were untenanted. Mark then strolled up the town, exchanging a passing glance with Chester, who, in a velveteen coat, low hat, and gaiters, was chatting with a waggoner going with a load of hay for the next morning's market in London. He turned into an inn, called for a pint of the best port, and sat down in the parlour at a table close to the window, so that he could see all who went up or down. He entered into conversation with two or three people who came in, and so passed the time till six, when he felt too restless to sit still longer, and went out into the street.

When he was half-way to the Greyhound he heard the sound of a horse's hoofs behind him, and saw a quietly dressed man coming along at an easy trot. Had it not been that he recognised the horse, he could not have felt

sure that its rider was the man whose coming he had been waiting for, there being nothing in his appearance that would excite the slightest suspicion that he was other than a gentleman of moderate means and quiet taste, either returning from a ride or passing through on his way to town. He had a well-built and active figure, carried himself with the ease of a thorough horseman, and nodded to one or two persons of his acquaintance, and, checking his horse at the principal butcher's, ordered some meat to be sent in that evening.

Mark could trace no resemblance in the face to that of the young fellow he remembered. It was a quiet and resolute one. If this were Bastow, he had lost the sneering and insolent expression that was so strongly impressed on his memory. It might be the man, but if so he was greatly changed. Mark's first impression was that it could not be Bastow, but, when he thought over the years of toil and confinement in the convict prison, the life he had led in the bush, and the two years he had passed since he returned home, he imagined that the insolence of youth might well have disappeared and been succeeded by the resolute daring and the dogged determination that seemed to be impressed on this fellow's face.

Mark paused fifty yards before he reached the inn. In a few moments he saw Chester coming along. There was no one else in sight.

"Is it Bastow?" he asked, as the officer came up.

"It's Bastow, sure enough, sir. But he is so changed that if I had not had him in my mind I should not have recognised him. I calculate that a man who has gone

through what he has would have lost the expression he had as a boy. He must have learnt a lot in the convict prison, and the fact that he headed the mutiny and escaped from the searchers and managed to get home showed that he must have become a resolute and desperate man. All those burglaries and the way in which he has several times stopped coaches single-handed show his nerve and coolness. I had all that in my mind as he came along, and his face was pretty much what I expected to see it. He is a cool hand, and I can understand how he has given us the slip so long. There is none of the shifty look about his eyes that one generally sees in criminals; no glancing from side to side. He rode with the air of a man who had a right to be where he was and feared no one. He will be an awkward customer to tackle if we do not take him by surprise."

"Yes, I agree with you there. However, he won't have much chance of using either his pistols or his strength. Here is Malcolm coming, so I will walk away for a few minutes and let you go in first. You can tell the ostler now that you will have your horse put in at nine o'clock. I have been thinking, by the way, that we had better take the trap round behind the house instead of leaving it in the drive. The man may come back this way, and, if so, he might hear the horse stamp or make some movement, and that would at once put him on his guard."

As the officers entered the inn, Mark went into the yard and told the ostler that he had met some friends and should let his horse remain there for the night.

"It is possible that they may drive me into the town in the morning," he said; "and I shall very likely send a man down for the horse."

At a quarter to nine he went out again, and walked to the house he had before visited; in ten minutes he heard the sound of wheels, threw open the gate, and the men, jumping down, led the horse in.

"You may as well take him out of the trap," he said. "We cannot very well get that round the house, but there is no difficulty about taking the horse."

The officers had brought a halter and a nose-bag full of corn. The horse was fastened to a tree with soft ground round it, the nose-bag put on, and a horse-cloth thrown over its back; then Mark and his two companions went out into the lane, and in a couple of minutes entered the next gate, treading lightly and going round to the back of the house.

A light burnt in the kitchen, and an old woman could be seen knitting. They lifted the latch and walked in. Dropping her knitting, she rose with an exclamation of terror.

Mark advanced alone.

"Do not be frightened," he said, "we are not going to do you any harm." He took out his little ebony staff. "We are constables," he went on, "and have orders to search this house. We must secure you, but you will be released in the morning. Now, which is your room?"

In spite of Mark's assurance, the old woman was almost paralysed with terror. However, the two constables assisted her up to her room, and there secured

her with a rope, taking care that it was not so tightly bound as to hurt her. Then they placed a gag in her mouth and left her.

"Now, let us search his room in the first place," Mark said, when they came downstairs again. "I hardly expect we shall find anything. You may be sure that he will have taken great pains to hide away any booty that he may have here, and that it will need daylight and a closer search than we can give the place now before we find anything."

The search of the house was, indeed, fruitless. They cut open the bed, prised up every loose board in the bedroom and the parlour, lifted the hearth-stone, tapped the walls, and searched every drawer; then, taking a lantern, went out into the stable. The officers were both accustomed to look for hiding-places, and ran their hands along on the top of the walls, examining the stone flooring and manger.

"That is a very large corn-bin," Mark said, as he looked round, when they desisted from the search.

"You are right, sir; we will empty it."

There were two or three empty sacks on the ground near it, and they emptied the corn into these, so that there should be no litter about. Chester gave an exclamation of disappointment as they reached the bottom. Mark put his hand on the bin and gave it a pull.

"It is just as I thought," he said. "It is fastened down. I saw an axe in the woodshed, Malcolm; just fetch it here."

While the man was away Mark took the lantern and examined the bottom closely. "We shan't want the

axe," he said, as he pointed out to Chester a piece of string that was apparently jammed in the form of a loop between the bottom and side. "Just get in and clear those few handfuls of corn out. I think you will see that it will pull up then."

There was, however, no movement in the bottom when Mark pulled at the loop.

"Look closely round outside," he said, handing Malcolm, who had now returned, the lantern. "I have no doubt that there is a catch somewhere."

In a minute or two the constable found a small ring between two of the cobble-stones close to the foot of the wall. He pulled at it, and as he did so Mark felt the resistance to his pull cease suddenly and the bottom of the bin came up like a trap-door.

"That is a clever hiding-place," he said. "If I had not happened to notice that the bin was fixed we might have had a long search before we found it here."

Below was a square hole, the size of the bin; a ladder led down into it. Mark, with a lantern, descended. Four or five sacks piled on each other lay at the bottom, leaving just room enough for a man to stand beside them.

"The top one is silver by the feel," he said, "not yet broken up; these smaller sacks are solid; I suppose it is silver that has been melted down. This," and he lifted a bag some eighteen inches deep, opened it, and looked in, "contains watches and jewels. Now, I think we will leave things here for the present and put everything straight. He may be back before long." Mark ascended, the bottom of the trap was shut down again,

the corn poured in and the bags thrown down on the spot from which they had been taken. They returned to the house, shut the door, and extinguished the light.

"That has been a grand find," he said ; "even if this is not Bastow, it will be a valuable capture."

"That it will, Mr. Thorndyke. I have no doubt that this fellow is the man we have been in search of for the last eighteen months ; that accounts for our difficulty in laying hold of him ; he has been too careful to try to sell any of the plunder that he has got, so that none of the fences should know anything about him. No doubt he has taken sufficient cash to enable him to live here quietly. He intended some time or other to melt down all the rest of the plate and to sell the silver, which he could do easily enough. As for the watches and jewels, he could get rid of them abroad."

"No doubt that is what he intended," Mark agreed. "It is not often these fellows are as prudent as he has been ; if they were, your work would be a good deal more difficult than it is."

"You are right, sir ; I don't know that I ever heard of such a case before. The fellow almost deserves to get away."

"That would be rewarding him too highly for his caution," Mark laughed. "He is a desperate villain, and all the more dangerous for being a prudent one. Now, I think one of us had better keep watch at the gate by turns. We shall hear him coming in plenty of time to get back here and be in readiness for him ; mind, we each understand our part. I will stand facing the door. It is possible that he may light that lantern

that we saw hanging in the stable, but I don't think it likely that he will do so ; he will take off the saddle, and either take the horse in there—there is plenty of food in the manger—or else turn it out into the paddock. As he comes in I will throw my arms round him and you will at once close in, one on each side, each catch an arm tightly, handcuff him, and take the pistols from his belt ; don't let go of his arms until I have lit the candle, he may have another pistol inside his coat and might draw it."

It was now one o'clock, and half an hour later Malcolm, who was at the gate, came in quietly and said he could hear a horse coming along the lane.

"Which way, Malcolm?"

"Tooting way."

"That is all right. I have been a little nervous that our horse might make some slight noise and attract his attention ; that was our only weak point."

They had already ascertained that the front door was locked and bolted, and that he must therefore enter through the kitchen. They heard the horse stop in front ; a moment later the gate was opened, and through the window they could just make out the figure of a man leading a horse, then the stable-door opened, and they heard a movement and knew that the horse was being unsaddled ; they heard it walk into the stable, the door was shut behind it, and a step approached the back door. It was opened, and a voice said, with an oath, "The old fool has forgotten to leave a candle burning." Then he stepped into the kitchen.

In an instant there was the sound of a violent struggle,

deep oaths and curses, two sharp clicks, then all was quiet except heavy breathing and the striking of flint on a tinder-box ; there was the blue glare of the sulphur match, and a candle was lighted. Mark then turned to the man who was standing still grasped in the hands of his two captors.

"Arthur Bastow," he said, producing his staff, "I arrest you, in the king's name, as an escaped convict, as a notorious highwayman and house-breaker."

As his name was spoken the man started ; then he said, quietly,—

"You have made a mistake this time, my men ; my name is William Johnson ; I am well known here, and have been a quiet resident in this house for upwards of a year."

"A resident, but not a quiet resident, Bastow. I don't think we are mistaken ; but even if you can prove that you are not Bastow, but William Johnson, a man of means and family, we have evidence enough upon the other charges. We have been in search of you for a long time, and have got you at last. You don't remember me, though it is but eighteen months since we met ; but I fancy that I then left a mark upon you that still remains on your shoulder. I am Mark Thorndyke, and you will understand now why I have hunted you down."

"The game is not finished yet," the man said, recklessly. "The hunting down will be the other way next time, Mark Thorndyke."

"I don't think so. Now, Chester, you may as well tie his feet together and then search him. When that

is done I will look after him while you fetch the trap round."

In his pockets were found two gold watches, £48 in gold, and £100 in bank-notes.

"We shall hear where this comes from to-morrow," Malcolm said, as he laid them on the table. "It will save us the trouble of getting evidence from Australia."

The prisoner was placed in a chair, and then the two officers went out to fetch the trap round.

"So you have turned thief-catcher, have you," he said, in a sneering tone, that recalled him to Mark's memory far more than his face had done, "and you carry a Bow Street staff about with you, and pretend to belong to the force ; that is a punishable offence, you know."

"Yes, it would be if I had no right to use it," Mark said, quietly ; "but it happens that I have a right, having been for a year and a half in the force. I joined it solely to hunt you down, and now that I have done so my resignation will be sent in to-morrow."

"And how is the worthy Squire?"

Mark started to his feet and seized one of the pistols lying before him.

"You villain !" he exclaimed ; "I wonder you dare mention his name—you, his murderer."

"It was but tit for tat," the man said, coolly ; "he murdered me, body and soul, when he sent me to the hulks. I told him I would be even with him. I did not think I had hit him at the time, for I thought that if I had you would have stopped with him, and would not have chased me across the fields."

"You scoundrel !" Mark said. "You know well

enough that you came back, stole into his room, and stabbed him."

Bastow looked at him with a puzzled expression.

"I don't know what you are talking about," he said. "I fired at him through the window,—I don't mind saying so to you, because I know that you have no witnesses,—saw him jump up, but I fancied I had missed him. I saw you bolt out of the room, and thought it better to be off at once instead of taking another shot ; you gave me a hard chase. It was lucky for you that you did not come up with me, for if you had done so I should have shot you ; I owed you one for having killed as good a comrade as man ever had, and for that bullet you put in my shoulder before. If I had not been so out of breath that I could not feel sure of my aim I should have stopped for you, but I rode straight to town."

"A likely story," Mark said, shortly. "What! you will pretend that there were two murderers hanging round the house that night ; a likely tale, indeed."

"I tell you that if your father was killed by a knife or dagger, I had nothing to do with it," the man said. "I am obliged to the man, whoever he was. I had intended to go down again to Reigate to finish the job myself ; I should scarcely have missed a second time. So it is for that you hunted me down. Well, I don't blame you ; I never forgive an injury, and I see your sentiments are mine. Whether I killed your father or not makes no difference ; he was killed, that is the principal point ; if I were going to be put on my trial for that I could prove that at eight o'clock I was in a coffee-house

in Covent Garden. I purposely kicked up a row there and was turned out, so that if I were charged with that shooting affair I could prove that I was in London that evening."

"I can quite believe that," Mark said; "a fast horse would have brought you up to town in an hour and a half, and another fast horse would have taken you back again as quickly; so you might have been in London at eight and back again at Crowswood by half-past twelve or one, even if you stopped a couple of hours at a coffee-house. However, you won't be tried for that. Those things on the table and the contents of that corn-bin are enough to hang you a dozen times."

"Curse you, have you found that out?" Bastow exclaimed, furiously.

"We have," Mark replied. "It would have been wiser if you had got rid of your things sooner. It was a clever hiding-place, but it is always dangerous to keep such things by you, Bastow."

The man said no more, but sat quietly in his chair until they heard the vehicle stop outside the gate. Then the two constables came in and, lifting Bastow, carried him out and placed him in the bottom of the cart.

"You can loose the old woman now, Malcolm," Mark said, as he took his seat and gathered the reins in his hand. "By eleven o'clock no doubt one of the others will be down with the gig again, and you can empty out the contents of that hole and bring them up with you. I don't think that it will be of any use searching farther. You might have a good look all round before you come away. There may be some notes

stowed away, though it is likely enough that they have been sent away by post to some receiver abroad."

For some time after starting they could hear the prisoner moving about uneasily in the straw.

"I suppose there is no fear of his slipping out of those handcuffs, Chester?"

"Not a bit; they are full tight for him. I expect that that is what is making him uncomfortable."

Presently the movement ceased.

"He is still enough now, Mr. Thorndyke. I should not be at all surprised if he has dropped off to sleep. He is hardened enough to sleep while the gibbet was waiting for him."

It was four o'clock in the morning when they drove up at Bow Street. Two constables on duty came out to the cart.

"We have got a prisoner, inspector," Chester said. "He is the man we have been looking for so long. I fancy we have got all the swag that has been stolen for the last eighteen months—bags of jewels and watches, and sacks of silver. He is handcuffed and his legs are tied, so we must carry him in."

The officer fetched out a lantern. The other constable helped him to let down the back board of the cart.

"Now, Bastow, wake up," Chester said; "here we are."

But there was no movement.

"He is mighty sound asleep," the constable said.

"Well, haul him out." And taking the man by the shoulders they pulled him out from the cart.

"There is something rum about him," the constable

said ; and as they lowered his feet to the pavement his head fell forward, and he would have sunk down if they had not supported him.

The inspector raised the lantern to his face.

"Why, the man is dead," he said.

"Dead !" Chester repeated, incredulously.

"Ay, that he is. Look here," and he pointed to a slim steel handle some three inches long, projecting over the region of the heart. "You must have searched him very carelessly, Chester. Well, bring him in now."

They carried him into the room, where two candles were burning. Mark followed them. The inspector pulled out the dagger, the blade of which was but four inches long and very thin. The handle was little thicker than the blade itself. Mark took it and examined it.

"I have not a shadow of doubt that this is the dagger with which he murdered my father. The wound was very narrow, about this width, and the doctor said that the weapon that had been used was certainly a foreign dagger."

"I don't think this is a foreign dagger," the inspector said on examining it, "although it may be the one that was used, as you say, Mr. Thorndyke. It has evidently been made to carry about without being observed."

He threw back the dead man's coat.

"Ah, here is where it was kept. You see the lining has been sewn to the cloth, so as to make a sheath down by the seam under the arm. I expect that, knowing what would happen if he were caught, he had made up his mind to do it all along. Well, I don't

know that you are to be so much blamed, Chester, for, passing your hand over his clothes, you might very well miss this, which is no thicker than a piece of whale-bone. Well, well, he has saved us a good deal of trouble. You say you have got most of the booty he has collected."

"I don't know that we have got all of it, sir, but we have made a very big haul, anyhow; it was a cunningly contrived place. There was a big corn-bin in the stable, and when we had emptied out the corn it seemed empty. However, Mr. Thorndyke discovered that the bin was fixed. Then we found that the bottom was really a trap-door, and under it was a sort of well in which were sacks and bags. One of the sacks was full of unbroken silver, two others contained silver ingots, things that he had melted down, and there was a large bag full of watches and jewels. In his pocket we found £100 in bank notes, about fifty guineas, and a couple of gold watches."

"That he must have got to-night from the Portsmouth coach; we heard half an hour ago that it had been stopped near Kingston, the coachman shot, and the passengers robbed. It will be good news to some of them that we have got hold of their valuables. Well, Mr. Thorndyke, I have to congratulate you most heartily on the skill with which you have ferreted out a man who had baffled us for so long, and had become a perfect terror to the south of London. No doubt we shall be able to trace a great portion of the property in that sack. The capture has been splendidly effected."

"You will understand," Mark said, "that I do not

wish my name to appear in the matter at all. I have, as you know, been actuated by private reasons only in my search, and I see no occasion why my name should be mentioned ; the evidence of Chester and Malcolm will be ample. From information received, they went down to this place, searched it in his absence, discovered the stolen goods, and captured them. Having handcuffed and bound him, one drove him up to town, the other remaining to guard the treasure. On his way he got at this hidden dagger and stabbed himself. My evidence would not strengthen the case at all."

"No ; I don't see that it will be necessary to call you, Mr. Thorndyke. The discovery of this hidden booty and the proceeds of the coach robbery would be quite sufficient. Beyond the coroner's inquest there will be no enquiry. Had it been otherwise, it might probably have been necessary to call you at the trial. However, as it is, it will save a lot of trouble ; now we shall only need to find the owners of these bank-notes. I will send off a cart for the things as early as I can get one, and will send a couple of constables round to the houses where burglaries have been committed to request the owners to come over and see if they can identify any of their property ; and those who do so can attend the inquest to-morrow, though I don't suppose they will be called. The chief will be mightily pleased when he hears of what has taken place, for he has been sadly worried by these constant complaints, and I fancy that the authorities have been rather down upon him on the subject. The announcement that the career of this famous robber has been brought to an end will cause

quite a sensation, and people will sleep more quietly than they have done lately round the commons on the south side. I expect that if he had not put an end to himself we should have had to send him across to Newington to-day ; for, of course, it is a Surrey business, though we have had the luck to take him. I suppose we shall not see much of you in the future, Mr. Thorndyke?"

"No, indeed," Mark said. "My business is done, and I shall send in my resignation this morning. I don't regret the time that I have spent over it. I have learned a great deal and have seen a lot of the shady side of life, and have picked up experience in a good many ways."

Mark, after requesting the inspector to find a man to go over to Streatham and bring back his horse, and writing an order to the ostler to deliver it, walked across to his lodgings. Upon the whole, he was not sorry that Bastow had taken the matter into his own hands ; he had, certainly, while engaged in the search, looked forward to seeing him in the dock and witnessing his execution, but he now felt that enough had been done for vengeance, and that it was as well that the matter had ended as it had. He was wearied out with the excitement of the last forty-eight hours. It was one o'clock when he awoke, and, after dressing and going into Covent Garden to lunch at one of the coffee-houses, he made his way up to Islington.

"Taking a day's holiday?" Millicent asked, as he came in.

"Well, not exactly, Millicent ; I have left school altogether."

"Left school, Mark ; do you mean that you have decided that it is of no use going on any longer?"

"I have given it up because I have finished it. Arthur Bastow was captured last night, and committed suicide as he was being taken to the station."

An exclamation of surprise broke from Mrs. Cunningham and Millicent.

"It seems horrid to be glad that anyone has taken his own life," the latter said ; "but I cannot help feeling so, for as long as he lived I should never have considered that you were safe, and besides, I suppose there is no doubt that if he had not killed himself he would have been hung."

"There is not a shadow of doubt about that," Mark replied. "We found the proceeds of a vast number of robberies at his place, and also in his pockets the money he had taken from the passengers of the Portsmouth coach an hour before we captured him. So that, putting aside that Australian business altogether, his doom was sealed."

"Now, please tell us all about it," Mrs. Cunningham said. "But first let us congratulate you most warmly not only on the success of your search, but that the work is at an end."

"Yes, I am glad it is over. At first I was very much interested ; in fact, I was intensely interested all along, and should have been for however long it had continued. But, at the same time, I could do nothing else, and one does not want to spend one's whole life as a detective. At last it came about almost by chance, and the only thing I have to congratulate myself upon is that my

idea of the sort of place he would have taken was exactly borne out by fact." And Mark then gave them a full account of the manner in which the discovery had been made and the capture effected.

"You see, Millicent, I followed your injunction, and was very careful ; taking him by surprise as I did, I might have managed it single-handed, but with the aid of two good men it made a certainty of it, and the whole thing was comfortably arranged."

"I think you have done splendidly, Mark," Mrs. Cunningham said. "It was certainly wonderful that you should have found him doing exactly what you had guessed, even down to the deaf servant. Well, now that is done and over, what do you think of doing next?"

"I have hardly thought about that," he replied ; "but, at any rate, I shall take a few weeks' holiday, and I suppose after that I shall settle down to the search for my uncle's treasure. I am afraid that will be a much longer and a vastly more difficult business than this has been. Here there were all sorts of clues to work upon. Bastow ought to have been captured months ago ; but in this other affair, so far, there is next to nothing to follow up. We don't even know whether the things are in India or in England. I believe they will be found, but that it will be by an accident. Really, I fancy that we shall hear about them when you come of age, Millicent. There was to have been no change till that time, and I cannot help thinking that Uncle George must have made some provision by which we should get to know about them in the event of his death without his having an opportunity of telling anyone where they are.

“He might have been killed in battle ; he might have been drowned on his way home. He had thought the whole matter over so thoroughly, I do not think the possibilities of this could have escaped him. As I told you, Mr. Prendergast made enquiries of all the principal bankers and Indian agents here, and altogether without success. After he had done that, I got a list of all the leading firms in Calcutta and Madras, and wrote to them, and all the replies were in the negative. It is true that does not prove anything absolutely. Eighteen years is a long time, and the chances are that during those years almost every head of a firm would have retired and come home. Such a matter would only be likely to be known to the heads ; and if, as we thought likely, the box or chest was merely forwarded by a firm there to England, the transaction would not have attracted any special attention. If, upon the other hand, it remained out there, it might have been put down in a cellar or store, and have been lying there ever since altogether forgotten.”

“I don't see myself why you should bother any more about it ; perhaps, as you say, it will turn up of itself when I come of age. At any rate, I should say it is certainly as well to wait till then and see if it does, especially as you acknowledge that you have no clue whatever to work on. It is only three more years, for I will be eighteen next week, and it certainly seems to me that it will be very foolish to spend the next three years in searching about for a thing that may come to you without any searching at all.”

“Well, I will think it over.”

"You see you really don't want the money, Mark," she went on.

"No, I don't want it particularly, Millicent, but when one knows that there is something like £50,000 waiting for one somewhere, one would like to get it. Your father worked for twenty years of his life accumulating it for us, and it seems to me a sort of sacred duty to see that his labour has not all been thrown away."

Millicent was silent.

"It is very tiresome," she said, presently. "Of course, my father intended, as you say, that his savings should come to us, but I am sure he never meant that they should be a bother and a trouble to us."

"I don't see why they should ever be that, Millicent. As it is, we have both sufficient for anything any man or woman could reasonably want, and neither of us need fret over it if the treasure is never found. Still, he wished us to have it, and it is properly ours, and I don't want it to go to enrich someone who has not a shadow of a right to it."

On the following morning Mark went to attend the inquest on Bastow. He did not go into the court, however, but remained close at hand in the event of the coroner insisting upon his being called. However, the two men only spoke casually in their evidence of their comrade Roberts, who had been also engaged in the capture. One of the jurymen suggested that he should also be called, but the coroner said,—

"I really cannot see any occasion for it; we are here to consider how the deceased came by his death, and I think it must be perfectly clear that he came by it by his

own act. You have heard how he was captured, that the spoils of the coach that he had just rifled were found upon him, and that the booty he had been acquiring from his deeds for months past also was seized ; therefore, as the man was desperate, and knew well enough that his life was forfeited, ample motive there was for his putting an end to his wretched existence. I really do not think, gentlemen, that it is worth while to waste your time and mine by going into further evidence."

Finally, a verdict of *felo-de-se* was returned, with a strong expression of the jury's admiration of the conduct of Constables Malcolm, Chester, and Roberts, who had so cleverly effected the capture of the man who had so long set the law at defiance.



CHAPTER XVI.

FOUR days later Mark, on his return from dinner, found Philip Cotter sitting in his room waiting for him. They had met on the previous evening, and Cotter had expressed his intention of calling upon him the next day.

"I am here on a matter of business, Thorndyke," the latter said, as they shook hands.

"Of business!" Mark repeated.

"Yes. You might guess for a year, and I don't suppose that you would hit it. It is rather a curious thing. Nearly twenty years ago——"

"I can guess it before you go any farther," Mark exclaimed, leaping up from the seat that he had just taken. "Your people received a box from India."

"That is so, Mark; although how you guessed it I don't know."

"We have been searching for it for years," Mark replied. "Our lawyer, Prendergast, wrote to you about that box; at least he wrote to you asking if you had

any property belonging to Colonel Thorndyke, and your people wrote to say they hadn't."

"Yes ; I remember I wrote to him myself. Of course that was before you did me that great service, and I did not know your name, and we had not the name on our books. What is in the box?"

"Jewels worth something like £50,000."

"By Jove ! I congratulate you, old fellow ; that is to say, if you have the handling of it. Well, this is what happened. The box was sent to us by a firm in Calcutta, together with bills for £50,000. The instructions were that the money was to be invested in stock, and that we were to manage it and to take £100 a year for so doing. The rest of the interest of the money was to be invested. The box was a very massive one, and was marked with the letters X.Y.Z. It was very carefully sealed. Our instructions were that the owner of the box and the money might present himself at any time."

"And that the proof of his ownership was to be that he was to use the word Masulipatam," Mark broke in, "and produce a gold coin that would probably—though of this I am not certain—correspond with the seals." He got up and went to the cabinet, which he had brought up with him from Crowswood, unlocked it, and produced the piece of paper and the coin.

"Yes, that looks like the seals, Thorndyke. At any rate, it is the same sort of thing. Why on earth didn't you come with it before, and take the things away?"

"Simply because I did not know where to go. My uncle was dying when he came home, and told my

father about the treasure, but he died suddenly, and my father did not know whether it was sent to England or committed to someone's charge in India, or buried there. We did the only thing we could, namely, enquired at all the banks and agents here and at all the principal firms in Madras and Calcutta to ask if they had in their possession any property belonging to the late Colonel Thorndyke."

"You see we did not know," Cotter went on, "any more than Adam, to whom the box belonged. Fortunately the agent sent in his communication a sealed letter, on the outside of which was written, 'This is to remain unopened, but if no one presents himself with the token, it is to be read on the 18th of August, 1789.' That was yesterday, you know."

"Yes, that was my cousin's eighteenth birthday. We thought if my uncle had left the box in anyone's charge he would probably have given him some such instructions, for at that time there was hard fighting in India, and he might have been killed any day, and would therefore naturally have made some provisions for preventing the secret dying with him."

"We did not think of it until this morning early, though we have been rather curious over it ourselves. When we opened it, inside was another letter addressed, 'To be delivered to John Thorndyke, Esquire, at Crawley, near Hastings, or at Crowswood, Reigate, or, in the event of his death, to his executors.'"

"I am one of his executors," Mark said; "Mr. Prendergast, the lawyer, is the other. I think I had better go round to him to-morrow and open the letter there."

"Oh, I should think you might open it at once, Thorndyke. It will probably only contain instructions, and, at any rate, as you have the coin and the word, you could come round to-morrow morning and get the chest out if you want it."

"I won't do that," Mark said. "The coffer contains gems worth over £50,000 ; I would very much rather it remained in your keeping until I decide what to do with it. How large is it?"

"It is a square box about a foot each way ; and it is pretty heavy, probably from the setting of the jewels. Well, anyhow, I am heartily glad, Thorndyke. I know, of course, that you are well off, still £100,000,—for the money has doubled itself since we have had it,—to say nothing of the jewels, is a nice plum to drop into anyone's mouth."

"Very nice, indeed, although only half of it comes to me under my uncle's will. To tell you the truth, I am more glad that the mystery has been solved than at getting the money ; the affair was a great worry to my father, and has been so to me. I felt that I ought to search for the treasure, and yet the probability of finding it seemed so small that I felt the thing was hopeless, and that really the only chance was that my uncle would have taken just the course he did, and have fixed some date when the treasure should be handed over, if not asked for. I rather fancied that it would not have been for another three years, for that is when my cousin comes of age."

"What cousin do you mean?" Philip Cotter asked. "I did not know you had one."

"Well, that is at present a secret, Cotter ; one of the mysteries connected with my uncle's will. For myself, I would tell it in the market-place to-morrow, but she wishes it to be preserved at present ; you shall certainly know as soon as anyone. By the way, I have not seen you at Mrs. Cunningham's for the last week, and you used to be a pretty regular visitor."

"No," the young man said, gloomily. "I don't mind telling you that Miss Conyers refused me a fortnight ago ; I never thought that I had much chance, but I had just the shadow of hope, and that is at an end now."

"Perhaps in the future," Mark suggested, for the sake of saying something.

"No ; I said as much as that to her, and she replied that it would always be the same, and I gathered from her manner, although she did not exactly say so, that there was someone else in the case, and yet I have never met anyone often there."

"Perhaps you are mistaken," Mark said.

"Well, whether or not, there is clearly no hope for me. I am very sorry, but it is no use moping over it. My father and mother like her so much, and they are anxious for me to marry and settle down ; altogether, it would have been just the thing. I do not know whether she has any money, and did not care, for of course I shall have plenty. I shall be a junior partner in another six months ; my father told me so the other day. He said that at one time he was afraid that I should never come into the house, for that it would not have been fair to the others to take such a reckless fellow in ; but that I seemed to have reformed so thoroughly since

that affair that, if I continued so for another six months, they should have no hesitation in giving me a share."

It was too late to go up to Islington that evening. In the morning Mark went with the still unopened letter to the solicitors. The old lawyer congratulated him most heartily when he told him of the discovery he had made.

"I am heartily glad, Mark ; not so much for the sake of the money, but because I was afraid that that confounded treasure was going to unsettle your life. When a man once begins treasure-hunting it becomes a sort of craze, and he can no more give it up than an opium-smoker can the use of the drug. Thank goodness, that is over ; so the capital amount is doubled, and you are accordingly worth £75,000 more than you were this time yesterday,—a fine windfall. Now let us see what your uncle says."

He broke the seal. The letter was a short one :

"MY DEAR JOHN,—If you have not, before you receive this, got my treasure, you will get it on the 18th or 19th of August, 1789. I have made a will which will give you full instructions what to do with it. I may say, though, that I have left it between a little daughter, who was born six months ago, and your son Mark. My own intentions are to stop out here until I get the rank of general, and I have taken the measures that I have done in case a bullet or a sharp attack of fever carries me off suddenly. I hope that you will have carried out the provisions of my will, and I hope also that I shall have come home and talked the whole matter over with you before I go under.—Your affectionate brother."

"A singular man," Mr. Prendergast said, as he laid the letter down on the table beside him. "What trouble these crotchety people do give. I suppose you have altogether put aside that folly of his about the jewels?"

"Well, no, I can't say that I have, Mr. Prendergast. Do you know that I have a fancy—it may only be a fancy, but if so I cannot shake it off—that I am watched by Lascars. There was one standing at the corner of the street as I came up this morning, and again and again I have run across one. It is not always the same man, nor have I any absolute reasons for believing that they are watching me; still, somehow or other, I do come across them more frequently than seems natural."

"Pooh, nonsense, Mark! I should have thought that you were too sensible a fellow to have such ridiculous fancies in your head."

"Of course, I should never have thought of such a thing, Mr. Prendergast, if it had not been for what my father told me,—that my uncle was desperately in earnest about it, and had an intense conviction that someone watched his every movement."

"Don't let us talk of such folly any longer," the lawyer said, irritably. "Now that you have got the money, the best thing you can do is to go at once and carry out what was the wish of both your father and your uncle, and ask your cousin to marry you; that will put an end to the whole business, and I can tell you that I am positively convinced that the day she is twenty-one she will renounce the property, and that, if you refuse to take it, she will pass it over to some hospital or other. You cannot do better than prevent her from

carrying out such an act of folly as that, and the only way I can see is by your marrying her. I gathered from what you said when I gave you the same advice at Reigate, that you liked her, and should have done it had it not been for her coming into the estate instead of you. Well, you are now in a position to ask her to marry you, without the possibility of its being supposed that you are a fortune-hunter."

"I will think about it, Mr. Prendergast. Of course, this money does make a considerable difference in my position ; however, I shall do nothing until I have got the jewels off my hands."

"Well, a couple of days will manage that," the lawyer said ; "you have only got to take the box to a first-class jeweller and get him to value the things and make you an offer for the whole of them."

Mark did not care to press the subject, and on leaving went to Cotter's Bank. He was at once shown into his friend's room, and the latter took him to his father.

"It is curious, Mr. Thorndyke," the latter said, heartily, "that we should have been keeping your money all this time without the slightest idea that it belonged to you. We are ready at once to pay it over to your order, for if you pronounce the word you know of, and I find that the coin you have corresponds with the seals on the box, the necessary proof will be given us that you have authority to take it away. I have had the box brought up this morning so that we can compare the seals."

The box was taken out of the strong safe, and it was at once seen that the coin corresponded with the seals.

"I will leave it with you for the present, Mr. Cotter ; it contains a large amount of jewels, and until I have decided what to do with them I would rather leave them ; it would be madness to have £50,000 worth of gems in a London lodging, even for a single night ; as to the money, that also had better remain as it is at present invested. As I told your son, that and the jewels are the joint property of myself and another. I daresay that in a few days half of the money will be transferred to the name of the other legatee ; that can be easily done. I shall get my lawyer, Mr. Prendergast, to call upon you, Mr. Cotter. I suppose it would be better that some legal proof that we are entitled to the money should be given."

"I shall be glad to see him and to take his instructions," the banker said ; "but, in point of fact, I regard the property as being yours. I have nothing to do with wills or other arrangements. I simply received the box and the cash with an order that they should be delivered to whomsoever should come with the word 'Masulipatam' and a coin to match the seals. That you have done, and with subsequent dispositions I have no concern. I shall be happy to keep this box for you as long as you should think proper, and I have also written out an acknowledgment that I hold securities of the value, at the closing prices yesterday, of £103,000 16s." And he handed the paper to Mark.

As the latter left the bank he looked up and down the street, and muttered an angry exclamation as he caught sight of a rough-looking fellow just turning a corner into a side street. The glance was so momentary

a one that he could not say whether the man was a coloured seaman, but he certainly thought that he was a Lascar.

"I am going to have trouble about that bracelet," he said to himself, as he hailed a hackney coach and told him to drive to Islington. "I am convinced that the colonel was right, and that there are some men over in this country with the fixed purpose of seeing what is done with those jewels, and obtaining them if possible. How they could tell that they were deposited at Cotter's beats me altogether. It may be, indeed, that they really knew nothing about it, and have simply been watching me. They can hardly have been watching me for the last nine months, and yet, curiously enough, though I have never given the matter a thought since, Charley Gibbons said that it was a dark-coloured man who had brought the news that took them to my rescue and saved my life. I have often run against Lascars, and if they have taken this trouble all along, now that they have seen me come out of the bank, I shall be watched night and day.

"It is a creepy sort of idea, I should not be afraid of any number of them if they attacked me openly ; but there is no saying what they might do. I wish Ramoo had been here. I would have consulted him about it ; but as I got a letter from him only last week saying that he had, on the day of writing it, arrived in Calcutta, it is of no use wishing that. At any rate, I cannot do better than stick to the plan that my uncle sketched out, and take them across to Amsterdam. It would be very unfair to take them to any jeweller here.

He might have them in his possession for a week or ten days before he made me any definite offer for them, and during that time I would not give a fig for his life. If I distribute the stones at Amsterdam, they would hardly set about attacking twelve diamond merchants one after another. Well, at any rate, I must say nothing about the affair to Millicent and Mrs. Cunningham. It was bad enough my running risks in the pursuit of Bastow ; but this would be ten times worse, for I know Millicent would be for letting things remain for good at the banker's. But I have no idea of allowing myself to be frightened by two or three black scoundrels into throwing away £50,000."

Mrs. Cunningham and Millicent were sitting in their bonnets in the parlour.

"Here you are at last, sir," the girl said. "Another five minutes and we should have gone out. You told us that you would come early, and now it is twelve o'clock ; and you are generally so punctual in your appointments. What have you got to say for yourself?"

"A good many things have happened since then, Millicent. Last night your friend Mr. Cotter called upon me."

"Why do you say my friend ? He was your friend, and it was entirely through you that we knew him at all."

"Well, we will say 'our friend,' Millicent ; and he made a communication to me that this morning I had to go to Mr. Prendergast and make a communication to him."

"What do you mean by your communications?"

Millicent asked, laughing. "You are quite mysterious, Mark."

"And then I had to go," he went on, without heeding her interruption, "to Cotter's Bank, where I saw both our friend and his father, and there is the result of these communications and that interview." And he threw the paper to her.

"What does it mean?" she asked in astonishment, after glancing through it.

"It means, dear, that your father took exactly the precautions I thought he would take, and after sending his money and jewels home, he sent a sealed letter to the firm with whom he deposited them, which happened to be Cotter's, with instructions that should no one present himself with the word and coin by the 18th of August, 1789, that is to say on your eighteenth birthday, the envelope should be opened ; it was so opened, and it contained a letter that was to be sent to my father, or in the case of his death before that date, to his executors."

"How wonderful !" the girl said. "I quite gave up all idea of it. But how is it that it came to be so much ? Have they sold the jewels ?"

"No ; you see it is compound interest going on for seventeen years, and perhaps some rise in the value of the securities that has doubled the original sum invested ; as for the jewels, I have left them at the bank. I should not care about having £50,000 worth of such things in my rooms, and I should not think that you would like to have them here, either."

"Certainly not," Mrs. Cunningham said, emphati-

cally; "you did quite right, Mark. I don't think I could sleep, even if you had half a dozen of your detective friends posted round the house."

"Still, I suppose we shall have a chance of seeing them?" Millicent said.

"Certainly. I can make an appointment with Philip Cotter for you to see them at the bank; or if I take them to a jeweller to value, you could see them there. But I should think that the bank would be the best. I am sure that Cotter would put his room at your disposal, and of course if you would like to have some of them for yourself you could select any you liked, but I expect that they won't look much in their present settings; the Indian jewellers have not the knack of setting off gems. However, there is no hurry about them one way or another. The money, I have told Cotter's father, shall for the present remain as it is invested; it is all in the funds, Cotter said, for although the instructions were that it was to be put into good securities, he did not feel justified under the peculiar circumstances in going outside government stock. Mr. Prendergast is quite of opinion that it would be better to make no change until you come of age. I did not know that you would wait till then, for some time or other you might want to use some of them."

Millicent shrugged her shoulders.

"I think I would much rather have had just the money I had before, Mark; all this will be a great nuisance, I am sure. I think there ought to be a law against people having more than £20,000, whether in money or in land."

Mark laughed.

"It would be a bad thing for spendthrift young noblemen, Millicent. How are they to pay off their debts and mortgages if there were no heiresses ready to do so in exchange for a title?"

"It would be a good thing for them, I consider," the girl said, indignantly. "In the first place, they would not impoverish themselves if they knew that there was no way of building up their fortune again, and, in the next place, if they did ruin themselves they would have to either set to work to earn an honest living or blow out their brains, if they have any to blow out. I can assure you that I don't feel at all exultant at getting all this money, and I think that my father was quite right in wishing that I should know nothing about it until I married; but, on the other hand, I am heartily glad, more glad than I can say, Mark, that you have come into your share."

"I am glad for one reason, Millicent; that is, that this must put an end to the ridiculous idea you have of giving up Crowswood. Your father has made me rich beyond anything I could possibly have expected from him. I suddenly find myself a wealthy man, and I can buy another estate for myself worth more than Crowswood, if inclined to settle down as a squire; therefore your theory that I have been disappointed in not inheriting what I thought was my father's estate falls to the ground altogether. In no case would I ever have accepted your sacrifice. If you had liked to hand it over to St. Bartholomew's or Guy's Hospital, or to give it away to any other charity, I could not have prevented

you, but I would never have accepted it for myself. Now, thank goodness, the question cannot arise, for you must see that, even looking at the matter from a purely business point of view, I have benefited to an enormous and altogether unexpected extent by your father's will, and if any contest between us could arise, it should be on the ground that he has acted unfairly to you by giving me so large a proportion of the money that, in the course of nature, you should have inherited. It was not even as if he had known and liked me, for I was away at school at the time he came home to my father, and he never as much as saw me."

"You are very obstinate and very disagreeable, Mark," she said, with tears in her eyes.

"I think the obstinacy has been principally on your side, Millicent, though certainly I should not think of saying that you have been disagreeable. It has been an excess of kind-heartedness on your part, and you have resolutely closed your eyes to the fact that, had I been willing to take advantage of your generosity, I should have lacked the courage to do so, for I should have been pointed at, wherever I went, as a mean fellow who took advantage of his little cousin's romantic generosity. Pray, dear, let us say no more about it. We are two rich young people: each has a fine fortune in the funds; each has an estate; yours, I grant, is the largest; but, if I choose, I can increase mine until it is quite as large as Crowswood. We can be better friends than we have been for the last year, because this point of dispute has always stood between us and made us uncomfortable. Now you will have to think over what you would like

done and whether you wish any change made in your manner of living."

"Did you tell Mr. Cotter," Millicent laughed, after a pause, "that I had a half-share in the money?"

"No ; that was a matter for you to decide, not for me. I told him that I was only a half-shareholder, but there was no necessity to say who had the other half-share. When I was talking to Philip Cotter the words 'my cousin' slipped out, but he did not associate it in any way with you. It might have been the son of another brother or of a sister of my father's."

"In that case; then, we will certainly make no change ; will we, Mrs. Cunningham?"

"I think that is a matter for your consideration, Millicent. I think that Mr. Prendergast and Mark will probably be of opinion that you ought now to be introduced regularly into society. The fact that you are a rich heiress might, as your father so much wished, remain a secret. But it is one thing having this blazoned about and quite another for you to be living quietly here, where, with the exception of Mr. Cotter and a few other friends, you have no society whatever. Certainly it was not the wish of your father that you should remain unmarried. You are quite pretty and nice enough to be sought for for yourself alone, and I must say that I think, now that you have finished with your various masters, it would be well that you should go out a good deal more, and that as a first step we should go down to Bath this year instead of paying another visit to Weymouth, as we had arranged."

"I don't want any change at all, Mrs. Cunningham.

If I am to get married, I shall be married ; if I am not, I shall not fret about it."

"But for all that, Millicent," Mark said, "Mrs. Cunningham is right. We quite agree that there is no occasion whatever for you to go about labelled, 'A good estate and over £70,000 in cash;' but I do think that it is right that you should go into society. With the exception of Philip Cotter, Dick Chetwynd, and two or three other of my friends, you really know very few people. You have now gone out of mourning, and I think that Mrs. Cunningham's proposal that you should go down to Bath is a very good one. I shall not be sorry for a change myself, for I have been engrossed in my work for a long time now. I can go down a day or two before you and get you comfortable lodgings, and will myself stay at a hotel. Although I have no intimate friends beyond those from Reigate, I know a large number of men of fashion from meeting them at the boxing schools and other places, and could introduce you both and get you into society."

"I am altogether opposed to the idea," Millicent said, decidedly. "You want to trot me out like a horse for sale."

"No, Millicent," Mark said, calmly. "I only want you to have the same advantages that other girls have, neither more nor less, and for you to enjoy yourself as others do. There is nothing undignified or objectionable about that, especially as we are agreed that nothing shall be said about your fortune. Well, we will think it over. Mr. Prendergast and I certainly do not wish to act as tyrants, and there is no occasion to come

to a decision in a hurry. We have only discovered our good fortune to-day, and can scarcely appreciate the difference that it will make to us. We can think over what will be for the best at our leisure, and see if we cannot hit upon some plan that will be agreeable to you."

"Thank you, Mark," she said, gratefully. "I am afraid that you must think me very disagreeable and cross ; but though you, as a man, have not the same sort of feelings, I can assure you that I feel all this money and so on to be a heavy burden ; and were it not for your sake I could wish heartily that this treasure had never been discovered at all."

"I can quite understand that," he said, quietly. "At the present moment, even I do not see that it will be of much advantage to me ; but it may be that some day I shall see it in a different light. It has come upon me almost as suddenly as it has upon you. I thought that after I had finished with the Bastow affair I should set to work to find out this treasure, and that it would probably take me out to India, occupy me there for some time, and that afterwards I might travel through other places and be away from England for three or four years. Now the matter is altogether altered, and I shall be some time before I form any fresh plans. In fact, these must depend upon circumstances."

Mrs. Cunningham had left the room two or three minutes before, thinking that Mark might be able to talk her charge into a more reasonable state of mind were he alone with her, and he added, "Of one circumstance in particular."

She looked up enquiringly.

“Well, Millicent, it depends a great deal upon you. I know you think that all that has happened during the past year has been a little hard upon you, and I thoroughly agree with you ; you were fond of Crowswood, and were very happy there, and the change to this somewhat dull house, just at a time when you are of an age to enjoy pleasure, has been a trial. Then, too, there has been this question of the estate upon your mind ; but you must remember, it has been somewhat of a trial to me also. I grant that I have had plenty of occupation, which has been in every way beneficial to me, and have not in any way lamented leaving the country, but in one respect it has been a trial. I don’t know whether it ever entered your mind, before that sad time at home, that I was getting to care for you in a very different way to that in which I had done before.

“My father, I think, observed it, for he threw out a very plain hint once that he would very gladly see us coming together. However, I never spoke of it to you. I was young and you were young. It seemed to me that there was plenty of time, and that, moreover, it would not be fair for me to speak to you until you had had the opportunity of going out and of seeing other men. Then came the evening before his death, when my father told me how matters really stood, and he again said that there was a way by which all trouble could be obviated. But I saw that it was not so, and that the hope I had entertained must be put aside. I had never told you I loved you when I seemed to be the heir of the property and you only the daughter of an old comrade of his, and I saw that were I to speak

now, when you were the heiress, it could not but appear to you that it was the estate and not you that I wanted, and I felt my lips were sealed for ever. Mr. Prendergast said that day when he came down to the funeral, and you told him that you would not take the property, that it might be managed in another way, and you said that you did not want to be married for your money ; so you see you saw it in exactly the same light 'as I did.

“My first thought this morning, when Mr. Cotter told me that the money had mounted up to over £100,000, was that it would unseal my lips. You were still better off than I was, but the difference was now immaterial. I was a rich man, and had not the smallest occasion to marry for money. Whether I married a girl without a penny, or an heiress, could make but little difference to me, as I have certainly no ambition to become a great landowner. I still think that it would have been more fair to you to give you the opportunity of seeing more of the society of the world before speaking to you, but you see you are opposed to that, and therefore it would be the same did I wait another year, which I don't think I shall be able to do. I love you, Millicent. It is only during the past year, when I have thought that I had lost you, that I have known how much I love you, and how much my happiness depends upon you. I can truly say that were you penniless, it would make no shadow of difference to me. It is no longer a question of arranging matters comfortably ; it is a question of love. The estate is nothing to me. It never has been anything, and it does not count at all in the scale. I hope

that you will put it altogether out of your mind in giving me an answer, and that if you cannot say as truly and wholly as I do, 'I love you,' that you will say as frankly as you have always spoken to me, 'I love you very much as a cousin, Mark, but not in that way.' "

The girl had sat perfectly quiet while he was speaking. He was standing before her now, and he took one of her hands.

"I love you, dear. I love you with all my heart. Do you love me?" Then she looked up and rose to her feet, and placed both hands upon his shoulders.

"As you love me, so I love you, Mark."

After that, conversation languished till Mrs. Cunningham came into the room, five minutes later.

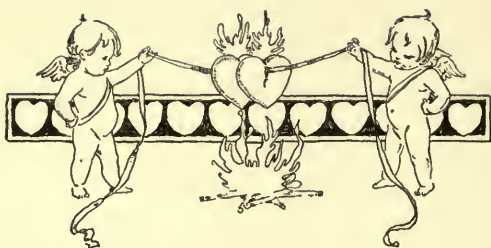
"We have come to the conclusion, Mrs. Cunningham," he said, "that there will be no necessity for the visit to Bath. Millicent is otherwise provided for: she has promised to be my wife."

"I am glad, Mark, glad, indeed." And she took Millicent in her arms and kissed her tenderly. "I have all along hoped for it, but I began to be afraid that you were both such obstinate young people that it would never come about. I know that your father wished it, Mark, and he told me that his brother had said that it would be a good arrangement if some day you should come to like each other. I have guessed for the last year, and, indeed, before then, that Millicent would not say 'No' if you ever asked her; but this stupid estate seemed to stand in the way. Of late, I have even come to hope that the obstinate girl would keep to her



“ As you love me, so I love you, Mark ”

intention, and that if, as I knew would be the case, you refused to take the estate, she would give it away to some charity. In that case, there could be nothing to prevent your speaking ; and even then you would have been, between you, very fairly equipped with this world's goods. However, the present is a far better solution, and the discovery of the treasure has saved you from three years' waiting before things were straightened out. I feel as if I were her mother, Mark, having had her in my charge since she was a baby ; and as she grew up it became my fondest hope to see you united some day, and I think that I am almost as pleased that my hope has been fulfilled as you are yourselves."



CHAPTER XVII.

AFTER thinking over the best way in which to set about the work of carrying the diamonds to Amsterdam, Mark decided upon asking the advice of his late chief. The latter said, as Mark entered his room,—

“I did not expect to see you here again, Mr. Thorn-dyke.”

“Well, sir, I have come to ask your advice about another matter altogether.”

“What is it now?”

“I have to convey a diamond bracelet of very great value across to Amsterdam. I have reason to believe that there is a plot to seize it on the way, and that the men engaged will hesitate at nothing to achieve their object. Under these circumstances I should be very much obliged if you will tell me what would be the best course to pursue. I must say that the bracelet is, with many other jewels, in a strong teak box of about a foot square, at present in the possession of our bankers ; they

were brought from India by my uncle. I imagine that the rest of the jewels are of comparatively little importance in the eyes of these men, though doubtless they would take them also if they laid their hands on them. The bracelet, however, is of special interest to them, not so much for its intrinsic value, but because it was stolen from one of their sacred idols.

"This was about twenty years ago ; but I have reason to believe that the search for it on the part of some Hindoos connected with the temple has never ceased ; the soldier who took it was murdered, his comrade, into whose hands it next passed, was also murdered. It next came to my uncle, who forwarded it at once to England. His bungalows were searched again and again, until probably the fellows came to the conclusion that he must have either buried it or sent it away. Nevertheless, to the day of his death he was firmly convinced that he was closely followed, and every movement watched. He warned my father solemnly that he, too, would be watched, but as far as we know it was not so ; at any rate, we had no reason to suppose that the house was ever entered. On the other hand, I am convinced I have been watched more or less closely ever since I came up to town, and as I came out from the bank yesterday I saw a man, a coloured fellow, I believe, on the watch.

"My uncle said that my life would not be worth an hour's purchase so long as I had the bracelet in my possession, and advised that it should be taken straight over to Amsterdam, broken up, and the diamonds sold singly to the merchants there."

"It is a curious story, Mr. Thorndyke. I own to ignorance of these Indian thieves and their ways, but it certainly seems extraordinary that so hopeless a quest should be kept up for so long a time. You are sure that it is not fancy on your part that you have been watched? I know you are not the sort of man to take fancies in your head, but as you have had the matter so strongly impressed upon you, you might naturally have been inclined to think this would be the case when it was not so."

"No, I don't think there is any chance of my being mistaken. It is only of late that I have thought about it, but when I did so, and thought over what had passed since I came to London, I recalled the fact that I had very often come across foreign seamen; sometimes they were Lascars, at others they might have been Italian or Spanish seamen; and you see, sir, it was, as I told you at the time, some foreign sailor who came and informed Gibbons that I had fallen into the hands of a gang of criminals, and that I should certainly be killed if I was not rescued immediately. Gibbons at once got together half a dozen fighting men, and, as you know, rescued me just in time. It was extraordinary that the man never came forward to obtain any reward."

"That was a friendly act, Mr. Thorndyke."

"Yes; I have no reason to suppose that these men would be hostile to me personally. I was not the thief; I was simply the person who happened to be in possession or rather might come into possession of the bracelet. From the close watch they had kept, they were, I imagine, well aware that I had not got it, but may have

thought, and doubtless did think, that I had some clue to its hiding place, and should sooner or later get it. With my death, the clue might be finally lost, and my life was consequently of extreme importance to them, and therefore they took steps to have me rescued, and the fact that they learned this and knew how friendly I was with Gibbons shows how close was the watch kept over me. No doubt, had Gibbons refused to help them, they would have come here at once."

"Certainly after what you say it would seem that your conjecture is right, and in that case if I were you I should take the bracelet out of the case and conceal it about me. I would not fetch it myself from the bank."

"I don't think I should be much safer so," Mark said, thoughtfully. "In the first place, I must go to the bank to get it, and I might be murdered merely on the supposition that I had brought the bracelet away. In the next place, even if I got to Amsterdam safely and got rid of the bracelet and returned unnoticed by them, a fresh danger would arise when I got the other gems into my possession, for they could not be certain whether the diamonds were still among them or not."

"I should hardly think that would be the case if they watch you as strictly as you believe. Even if none of them accompanied you, they would soon find out what diamond merchants you went to, and the leader might call upon these men, stating that he was commissioned to purchase some diamonds of exceptional value for an Eastern prince, in which case he would be sure to obtain sight of them.

"If I had your business to perform, I would not go near the bank again, but would send some friend I could trust to go and open the box and take out the bracelet and make it into a small parcel. He should hand it to you privately as you are on your way to embark for Amsterdam. Then I would take with me one or two of my men and, say, a couple of your prize-fighters, and with such a guard you ought to be fairly safe."

"I think that is a capital plan," Mark said, "and if I don't go to the bank there will be nothing to lead them to suppose that I have taken them out or that I am just going across to Holland."

Mark then went straight to Dick Chetwynd's lodgings.

"I want you to be of service to me, Dick," he said.

"With pleasure, Mark. What sort of service is it? If it is anything in my power, you know that you can absolutely rely upon me. You are not going to fight a duel, are you, and want a second?"

"No; quite another sort of business. I will tell you shortly what it is. I have to convey an extremely valuable diamond bracelet to Amsterdam, and I have reason to believe that there will be an attempt to murder me and to carry off the jewels before I can dispose of them. It happened in this way." And he then related the history of the diamonds, the reason he was followed, and the suggestions that the chief of the Bow Street detectives had given him.

"That is all right," Dick said, when he had concluded. "It is a rum business, but certainly I will do what you

ask me ; and what is more, I will go over with you to Amsterdam and see the thing through. It is an interesting business, if it is a queer one."

"You know Philip Cotter?"

"Of course, Mark ; why, I have met him with you several times."

"I will give you a note to ask him to allow you to open the case and to take from it the bracelet. I don't know whether it is a regular gold-mounted bracelet or simply some diamonds that have been fastened together as a necklace. However, I suppose you are sure to recognise them. They are altogether exceptional stones, and are sure to be done up in a packet by themselves, whatever the others may be. Say that you will call in and take them away some other time, of which I will give him notice by letter. I will write the note now, and if you can spare time to go there to-day all the better, for I shall be glad to get the business over ; then I will come again to-morrow morning and we will arrange the details of the plan. I will look in the shipping list and see what vessels are sailing for Amsterdam. When we have fixed on one, it will be best for you to take our passages under any names you like, so that they are not our own. The detectives will take their passages separately, and so will Gibbons and whoever else goes with us."

"I will go at once, Mark."

"Don't go straight there, Dick. If these fellows are dogging my footsteps everywhere, and saw me coming here, they might take it into their heads to follow you."

"Oh, they never can be doing all that sort of thing ;

that's too much to believe. However, to please you I will go into my club for a quarter of an hour. Shall I come round to your rooms this evening, or will you come here?"

"I think I will put off our meeting altogether until to-morrow morning. I have an engagement this evening that I cannot very well get out of."

"All right, Mark; just as you please. What time will you come round in the morning?"

"About the time you have finished breakfast. I will go now and have a look at the shipping list."

They parted at the door, and Mark went to the coffee-house where shipping matters were specially attended to, and where master mariners might often be met, conversing together or with ship-owners or merchants. On going through the list he found that the fast-sailing brig "Essex," of two hundred and four tons, and mounting eight guns, would sail for Amsterdam in three days' time, and would take in goods for that place, and, should sufficient freight be obtained, for any other Dutch port. It was also announced that she had good accommodations for passengers. Information as to cargo could be obtained from her owners, on Tower Hill, or from the captain on board, between the hours of ten and twelve. Then, in small type, it was stated that the "Essex" was at present lying in the outside tier, nearly opposite Anderson's wharf.

Mark made a note of all these particulars in his pocket-book, and then went to Ingleston's public-house.

"Morning, Mr. Thorndyke," the man said. "Haven't seen yer for the last month or so."

"No ; I have been out of town. Do you expect Gibbons in here this morning?"

"It is about his time, sir, when he has nothing in particular to see about. Like a turn with the mawleys this morning?"

"Not this morning, Ingleston. I have got some engagements for the next day or two where I could not very well show myself with a black eye or a swelled nose ; you have given me a good many of both."

"Well, Mr. Thorndyke, when one stands up against a man who is as strong as oneself, and a mighty quick and hard hitter, you have got to hit sharp and quick, too. You know my opinion, that there ain't more than half a dozen men in the country could lick you if you had a proper training."

"I suppose you couldn't get away for a week, or may be two," he said.

"Lor' bless you, no, sir ; who would there be to keep order here at night? When I first came here I had not given up the ring, and I fought once or twice afterwards. But Lor' bless you, I soon found that I had got either to give up the pub or the ring, and as I was doing a tidy business here, I thought it best to retire ; since then business has grown. You see boxing is more fashionable than it used to be, and there are very few nights when one don't have a dozen Corinthians in here, —sometimes there are twice as many,—either to see some of the new hands put on the mawleys, and judge for themselves how they are going to turn out, or maybe to arrange for a bout between some novice they fancy and one of the west countrymen. No, sir, I could not

do it ; anyhow, I should not like to be away even for one night, though I know Gibbons would look after things for me ; as for being away for a week, I could not do it for any money. No, sir ; my fight with Jackson, this spring, was the last time I shall ever go into the ring. I was a fool to go in for that, but I got taunted into it. I never thought that I should lick him, though ; as you know, sir, I have licked a good many men in my time, but Jackson is an out-and-out man, and he has got a lot more science than I ever had ; my only chance was that I could knock him out of time or wear him down ; but he was too quick on his pins for me to do the former. Ah, Gibbons, here is Mr. Thorndyke. He wants to see you ; you had best go into my room behind the bar."

"Want to get hold of a fresh hand, Mr. Thorndyke?" Gibbons asked, when they had sat down by the fire.

"No, Gibbons ; it is another business altogether. Have you got anything particular to keep you in town for the next fortnight? It may not be over a week, but it may be over a fortnight."

"No, sir," the man said, after taking three or four draws at his long pipe. "No, sir, they won't want rope and stakes for another three weeks, so I am your man, if you want me. What is it for, sir?"

"Well, it is rather a curious affair, Gibbons. I have to take a very valuable bracelet over to Amsterdam, to sell there, and I have very strong reasons for believing that if some fellows get an inkling of it they will try to put me out of the way, and get hold of the diamonds. I want a couple of good men to go with me."

"Well, sir, I should say you and me could lick a dozen ordinary chaps, without thinking anything of it."

"I daresay we could, Gibbons, in a stand-up fight without weapons, but I fancy these fellows will not try that. They are foreigners, and the first thing they would try would be to put a dagger between my shoulders as I walked up and down on deck at night, or, more likely still, creep into my cabin and stab me while I was asleep. If the voyage were only to last one night I might sit up, pistol in hand, but if the wind is foul we might be a week. We are a pretty strong party. Mr. Chetwynd—you know him—is going with me; there will also be two runners from Bow Street, and I want you to take another good man with you. Of course, on board we shall separate. The Bow Street men will watch the passengers, and you and your mate will smoke your pipes and keep yourselves ready to join in if you see there is going to be a row. But I rather think that the passage will be a quiet one. At Amsterdam, until I have got rid of the diamonds, I certainly should not care about going out into the street after nightfall without having you close behind me."

"All right. I should say Tom Tring would be as good a man as one could get at the job. What is the money to be, Mr. Thorndyke?"

"Well, what do you think yourself, Gibbons?"

"I take it you pay all the expenses, sir."

"Yes, everything."

"Would five-and-twenty guineas a head be too much?"

"No. I will do better than that. I will give you

five-and-twenty guineas each when we get to Amsterdam, and I will give you another twenty-five each if I come back here safe and sound."

"Well, I call that handsome. One could not want more, and you can rely on it that Tring will jump at the offer. He has not been able to get a fight on lately, and he is rather in low water."

"Well, you will both get up as quiet traders. I don't know what other passengers there may be, but I don't want them to know that you belong to the fancy."

"I twig, sir. We will get up quiet like."

"Then I want you to-morrow morning, Gibbons, to go down to Holmes & Moore, No. 67, Tower Street, and take two first-class tickets to Amsterdam on board the 'Essex,' which sails on Saturday. I don't know what the passage money will be, but this is sure to be enough; and we can settle accounts afterwards. You will find out what time of day she will start."

"All right, governor. I suppose you will be here again before that?"

"No, I don't suppose I shall, unless there is some change in the arrangements. If for any reasons Tring cannot go with you, you will get somebody else instead. You are sure that you quite understand your instructions? Here is the name and address of the people in Tower Street."

"All right, sir. You may make sure that when you go down to the ship you will see the two of us on board."

It needed but a few minutes at Bow Street to

inform the chief of the arrangements that had been made.

"I have told off Chester and Malcolm ; one of them shall go down and take their tickets. Of course, they will take their passages in the fore cabin, as the danger, if there is danger, may come from there, and you will have your other two men with you aft. I fancy myself that there is hardly any chance of your being in any way troubled while on board. It will be considered that there will be a vastly greater chance of carrying out any plan they may have formed at Amsterdam than there would be on board a ship ; you see if there were any struggle whatever on board there would be no escape for them.

"For myself, of course, I cannot give any opinion worth having in a matter so different from anything we have to do with here, and I should have unhesitatingly scoffed at the idea of anyone watching the movements of people for a long number of years in order to obtain the possession of jewels, however valuable. However, your uncle was well acquainted with the habits of Hindoos, and was not a man to be lightly alarmed ; you yourself, after your year with us, should not be deceived in such a matter as being yourself followed. Under these circumstances you are quite right to take every precaution, and as you pay well for the services of our two men, even if I had no belief whatever in the existence of danger to you, I should not feel justified in refusing to let you have them."

Having arranged these matters, Mark spent the rest of his time that day and the next at Islington.

"I am going across to Amsterdam on Saturday with a diamond bracelet to sell there."

Millicent looked at him in reproachful surprise.

"Why, surely, Mark, there can be no hurry about that. I think you might have stayed a little longer before running away."

"I should do so, you may be quite sure, Millicent, if I consulted my own inclinations, but I am bearing out your father's wishes. This bracelet is the most valuable of all the things he had, and I believe that it has some sort of history attached to it ; he told my father that he had sent all the gems home, principally to get these diamonds out of his possession ; he said that as soon as my father got hold of the things, he was to take the diamonds straight over to Amsterdam and sell them there, for he considered that they were much too valuable to be kept in the house, and that it was possible that some of the Hindoos might endeavour to get possession of them. At the time he spoke he believed that my father would, at his death, go to the bank and get the jewels, as of course he would have done if he had known where to find them ; my father promised him that they should be taken to Amsterdam at once, and, although so many years have passed since his death, I think I am bound to carry out that promise."

"I have never been able to understand, Mark, how it was that my father, when he gave all these instructions about me and these jewels, and so on, did not at the same time tell uncle where to find them."

"It was a fancy of his ; he was in very bad health, and he thought so much over these diamonds that it had

become almost a sort of mania with him that not only was there danger in their possession, but that he was watched night and day wherever he went. He thought even if he whispered where the hiding-place was to be discovered it might be heard ; therefore he deferred telling it until too late. Of course, all this was but a fancy on his part, although it is probable enough that the possession of the diamonds was a source of danger in India, and might have been a source of danger here had any thieves known that such valuable gems were kept in a private house or carried about. At any rate, I shall be glad to be free of the responsibility ; and although, naturally, I don't like leaving you at the present time, I think it best to carry out your father's instructions at once, and to get them off my mind altogether. Dick Chetwynd is going with me, so it will be a pleasant little trip."

"Well, I am glad he is going with you, Mark ; for, although I know well enough that they could never be watching for those diamonds to turn up all these years, I feel sure I should fidget and worry if you were alone. You are not going to take the others with you ?"

"No ; only this particular bracelet. None of the others are exceptionally valuable, so far as I know. At any rate, your father did not specially allude to them. I have no doubt that there are some really valuable jewels among them, for my uncle prided himself on being a judge of precious stones, and, as he invested a large amount of money in them, they are no doubt valuable. Still, I don't suppose there will be any difficulty in selling them here, and, at any rate, I don't want to be

delayed at Amsterdam by having to sell perhaps fifty or a hundred pieces of jewelry ; any time will do for that. I fancy that I ought to be able to dispose of the bracelet in three or four days at the outside. I have got from Bow Street a list of all the principal diamond merchants in Amsterdam. That is a matter of great interest to the force, as almost all precious stones stolen in this country are sent across there, and if there is any special jewel robbery we send over a list of all the articles stolen to the merchants there. As a rule, that would not prevent their dealing in them ; but there are some who will not touch things that have been dishonestly come by, and we occasionally get hints that enable us to lay hands upon thieves over there."

"I hate to hear you say 'the force,' Mark, just as if you were still a detective. It is bad enough that you should have belonged to it, even for the purpose you did ; but you have done with it now."

"Yes ; but you see, it is rather difficult to get out of the habit when one has been for over a year constantly at work at a thing. This will be my last absence on business, Millicent ; henceforward I shall be able to be always with you."

"Well, now that I know what you have been doing all this time, Mark, I must admit that you have been very good to have been with us as much as you have. I often used to wonder how you passed your time. Of course I knew that you were trying to find that man out, but it did not seem to me that you could be always at that, and I never dreamt that you had become a regular detective. I am very glad I did not know it. In the first

place, I should have been horrified, and in the second place, I should have been constantly uneasy about you. However, as this is to be the last time, I will let you go without grumbling."

"By the way, Millicent, what do you wish me to say about our engagement? I don't see that there is the slightest occasion for us to keep up the farce of your being Miss Conyers any longer. You cannot be married under a false name, you know, and now that you have escaped what your father was so afraid of, and are going to be married for love and not for money, I don't see why there should be any more mystery about it."

"But how would you account for my having been called Conyers all this time?"

"I should simply tell the truth: that your father, having a great fear that you might be married for money, left the estate to my father, to be held by him until you came of age, and that it was at his particular request that you were brought up simply as his ward, and dropped the family name and passed by your two Christian names. I should say that we have all been aware for a long time of the facts in the case, and I should also say that your father had left a very large fortune in addition to the estate between us, and had expressed a hope that we should, when the time came, marry each other."

"Then people will think that we have only married to keep the fortune together, Mark."

"Well, my dear, I don't suppose there are a great many people who will be interested in the matter, and those who get to know you will see at once that, as far

as I am concerned, there was no great difficulty in falling in with your father's ideas, while, on the other hand, they may consider that you made a noble sacrifice of yourself in agreeing to the plan."

"Nonsense, sir. I am not going to flatter you, as no doubt you expect ; but, at any rate, I am perfectly content with my share of the bargain."

"Well, there is one thing, Millicent : all that knew us down at Reigate will say that it is a very sensible arrangement, and will be glad to know that I shall retain the estate they have hitherto considered to be mine. Well, then, you agree to my mentioning to my intimate friends that you are my cousin and that we are engaged?"

"Yes, I suppose it is the best thing, Mark ; and, as you say, I must marry under my proper name, and it is just as well to get the talk over down at Reigate now as for it all to come as a wonder when we are married."

"When is that going to be, Millicent?"

"Oh, I don't know ; of course, it will be a long time before we even think of that."

"I beg your pardon, I am thinking of it now, and I can see no reason whatever why it should be delayed. We know each other well enough, I should think, and there is no probability of our changing our minds on discovering all sorts of faults that we never dreamt of each other having. I may be away for a fortnight, and I would suggest that you had better make your preparations at once, so that we can be married a fortnight after I come back."

"You say that there is no fear of our discovering faults in each other. I can assure you that I have just discovered a very serious fault, namely, that you are altogether too masterful, too bent upon having your own way. I know you always were when you were a boy, but I had hoped that you had grown out of it. Now I see that I was altogether mistaken. Seriously, Mark, your proposal is absurd."

"Where does the absurdity come in, Millicent?"

"Well, everywhere," she said, gravely.

"Which in the present case means 'nowhere,'" he said. "Do you mean to tell me, Millicent, that in this town there are not a hundred dress-makers each of whom could turn you out a wedding-dress and as many other garments as you can possibly require in the course of a month ; or, even if that effort were too stupendous, that you could not divide the work among a dozen of them?"

"Well, I don't say that that could not be done," Millicent said, reluctantly.

"Well, what other objection is there?"

"Well, you see one does not like to be hurried about such a matter as this, Mark. One likes to think it all over and to realise it to oneself."

"Well, dear, you will have a fortnight while I am away to think and to realise as much as you like. I can see no advantage myself in waiting a single day longer than there is a necessity for ; I have been for the last year coming here merely as a visitor, and I want to take possession of you and have you all to myself. I suppose Mrs. Cunningham will be coming in presently,

and I will put the matter to her. If she says you cannot be ready in a month I must give you another week, but I don't think that she will say so. By the way, how about her?"

"I was thinking of that last night, Mark. It would be very lonely for her to live by herself now, and you see she has always been as a mother to me."

"Quite so, dear, and I am sure that I should have no objection to her coming back to Crowswood, and living there as a friend and helping you in the housekeeping."

"Thank you very much, Mark. I should like that in every way. You see I know nothing whatever about housekeeping, and besides, when you are out, it would be a great thing to have her with me, for it would be very lonely by myself in that big house."

"Well, we will have her there by all means, dear, if she likes to come. You had better talk it over with her. Ah! here she is. We were just talking over the time it will take Millicent to get ready," he said, "and I shall be glad of your opinion. I have been telling her that I am going away for a fortnight, and have proposed that the marriage should come off a fortnight later. I cannot see any use in delay, and she does not either; at least, I suppose not, for the only objection she has advanced is that there will be but a short time in which to get her things ready. That strikes me as all nonsense. I could get things ready for ten weddings in that time. What do you think?"

"I see no reason for delay, certainly," Mrs. Cunningham said, "and assuredly a month ought to be sufficient to get everything made."

"Thank you, Mrs. Cunningham ; then we can consider that settled, Millicent !"

"I call this tyranny, Mrs. Cunningham," Millicent protested. "He says he proposes that we shall be married in a month ; it is not a proposal at all, it is an order. If he wanted me in such a hurry he might have said so a year ago ; and now that he has made up his mind at last he wants everything done in a hurry."

"It is the nature of men, my dear ; they are all alike in that respect. I think you had better make up your mind to it, especially as I have no doubt in this case the order is not a very unpleasant one."

"You are too bad, Mrs. Cunningham," Millicent said. "I made sure that I should find you an ally, and it seems you have gone over altogether to the enemy."

"Where are you going?" asked Mrs. Cunningham of Mark.

"I am going across to Amsterdam to sell that bracelet. My uncle expressed a particular wish to my father that he should do so immediately they came into his possession. Dick Chetwynd is going over with me, and if the weather is fair it will be a pleasant trip."

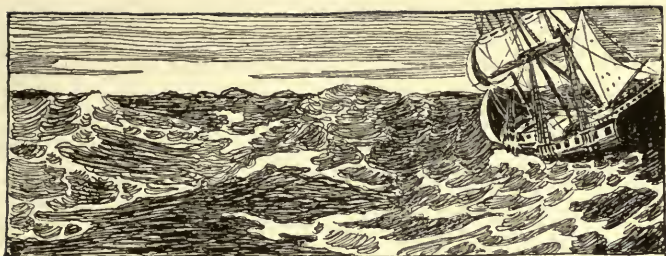
"Where are you thinking of going after the marriage?"

"We have not talked it over yet. My own idea is that as neither of us has been abroad we might as well take this opportunity for seeing something of the continent. Of course, we cannot go to France, things are in too disturbed a state there, but we might go to Brussels, and then into Germany, and perhaps as far as Vienna, and then down into Italy ; but, of course, if Millicent

prefers it, we will simply take a tour through England and Scotland."

"Oh! I am glad that I am to have some voice in the matter," Millicent said; "however, I should like the tour you propose very much, Mark. I have often thought that I should like to see Italy above all places."

"Well, then, we will consider that settled. And now, what are you going to do for to-day?"



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE "Essex" was to sail at eleven o'clock. Half an hour before that time Mark's hackney coach drew up for a moment at the foot of Ludgate Hill. Dick Chetwynd at once stepped up to the door, spoke a few words with him, and quietly passed a small parcel into his hands; then Mark drove on to the wharf. Dick walked back up Fleet Street as far as Temple Bar, and there hired another hackney coach, and followed him to the "Essex." He found Mark waiting for him at the wharf, and, hailing a boat, they went on board together. Both had sent their luggage down the night before. On getting on board, Mark saw the two prize-fighters walking up and down the deck forward. They were quietly dressed, and save for their size would have attracted no attention, and would been taken for two countrymen on their way to Holland on business.

The two detectives were seated forward, their appearance being that of two quiet business men, commercial travellers or small traders. The two friends first went

below and saw to the cabin which they were to share. Then they went on deck. Four or five other passengers were standing watching the last bales of goods coming on board. The tide was just on the turn, and a quarter of an hour later the warps were thrown off and some of the sails hoisted, and the "Essex" began to move through the water.

"Look there, Dick," Mark exclaimed. "Do you see that boat lying on its oars in the middle of the stream? That man sitting in the stern is a foreigner, either from Southern Europe or from India."

"He is certainly a dark man, Mark. Still, that may be only a coincidence."

"It is rather a curious one," Mark said. "We are too far off to see his features, but he is apparently watching us off. There, the oars are dipping into the water. He sees that we are fairly under way."

"Well, Mark, I shall begin to think that you are right. I am bound to say that hitherto I thought that it was ridiculous to suppose that you could have been watched as you thought; that you had got these diamonds on your brain till you had really become fanciful. However, it certainly looks as if you were right; but even if you were, how on earth could they have found out that we were going by this ship?"

"That is more than I can tell; if they have been watching me they must have known that I was intimate with you; they have seen me come out of Cotter's Bank, and afterwards enter your lodgings; they would feel sure that I had heard that there would be danger connected with the diamonds, and might suppose that I

should get some friend to take them from the bank, and may have followed your movements as well as mine. In that case they would have found out that you also went to Cotter's Bank, may have followed you to Tower Street, and found out that you had taken a passage for two to Amsterdam. They may again have seen you go to the bank this morning, and have guessed that you had the diamonds about you, and then, seeing us together on the wharf, would feel pretty certain that it was so. One of them may have hired that boat and watched the 'Essex' to see that neither of us went on shore again."

"Now they see that we are off they will be sure that their game is up," Chetwynd said.

"I am not so sure of that, Dick ; there are craft going every day to Antwerp and Flushing, and, for anything we know, some of them may be on board a craft already dropping down like ourselves by this tide. But even if we had twelve hours' start, by landing, say, at Flushing, they would have time to cross by land to Amsterdam and get there before us."

"Yes, I suppose they would ; well, it is pretty certain that we shall not be troubled on the voyage."

"Yes ; I never thought that there was much danger of that, because even if they were on board they would see that you and I, being always together, could not be got rid of without an alarm being given."

Not until they were passing Greenwich did either of the detectives come near Mark ; then, as he and Dick were standing by the bulwarks, looking at the hospital, Chester strolled across the deck, and, pointing to the building as if asking him some question about it, said,—

"There is a coloured man forward, dressed as a sailor."

"Is that so?" Mark said. "I see no one aft here who looks suspicious, but I don't think that they will try anything until we get to Amsterdam. There was a coloured man in a boat watching us as we set sail."

"I saw him, sir; can he get to Amsterdam before us?"

"Yes, I have no doubt he can; if he lands at Flushing or Antwerp, and takes a post-chaise or a diligence, I should say he could get there twenty-four hours before us. Certainly he could do so if he landed at the Hague, as we have to go a long way round to get into the Zuyder Zee. That is where the real danger will be; still, you had better keep a sharp lookout on the man forward."

No more was said. Mark was not long in getting into conversation with the other passengers aft, and later on strolled forward with Dick, asking the sailors some questions as to what sort of passage they were likely to have and how the wind suited; the men agreed that unless the wind shifted they would not be likely to make a quick passage.

"The wind is northeasterly," one of them said; "we can only just lay our course now, and it will be dead against us in some of the reaches. Well, I think we shall manage to make down to sea with only a tack or two, but when we are once fairly out of the river it will be a long leg and a short one, and going up round the Texel it will be dead against us, except that it would be worse if we had more east in it. It is about as foul a wind as we could have, and I don't see any sign of a change, worse luck."

Presently, moving about among them, he got next to Gibbons.

"I don't think we shall have any trouble on board," he said; "if there is any it will be after we have landed. But you can keep an eye on that foreign sailor standing alone there up in the bows."

"All right, sir; if you like I can manage to get into a quarrel with him, and can warrant that he won't get out of his berth before it is time to go ashore."

"No, I would leave him alone, Gibbons; as long as he is forward he can do no harm, but if you see him working his way aft after it gets dark, it will do him no harm if you manage to stumble against him and give him a clout on the head."

"All right, sir; if I hit him once he won't want another. The fellow seems quiet enough, and as far as strength goes he don't look stronger than a girl."

After chatting for some time longer, Mark and Dick Chetwynd went aft again. The "Essex" did not put into any intermediate port, and it was only on the sixth day after sailing that she approached Amsterdam. The voyage had passed off without any incident except that at nine o'clock one evening there had been a slight noise on deck and the sound of a fall. The friends went up at once. Several of the sailors had run aft, and Gibbons was explaining matters to them.

"I was walking up and down the deck," he said, "when I saw this chap staring down through the skylight, and I said to him, 'I don't call it good manners to be prying down into your better's cabin.' He did not answer or move, so I gave him a push, when he

turned upon me like a wild-cat, and drew his knife from his girdle. There it is," he said, glancing to the other side of the deck. "As I did not want daylight put into me, I just knocked him down."

"Served him right," one of the sailors said. "He had no right to have come aft at all, and if he drew his knife on you, you were quite right in laying him out. But you must have hit him mighty hard, for you have knocked the life pretty near out of him. Well, we may as well carry him forward and throw a bucket of water over him. That is the worst of these foreign chaps: they are always so ready with their knives. However, I don't think he will be likely to try his hand again with an Englishman."

Mark and his friend went below again. In the morning Mark asked one of the sailors if the foreigner was much hurt.

"Well, he is a good bit hurt, sir. That big chap looks as strong as a bullock, and his blow has flattened the foreign chap's nose. He cannot see out of his eyes this morning, and is keeping his bunk. They cannot stand a blow, those foreign chaps; but I don't suppose that any of us would have stood such a blow as that without feeling it pretty heavy. The man who hit him is quite sorry this morning that he hit him quite so hot, but, as he says, when a fellow draws a knife on you, you have not got much time for thinking it over, and you have got to hit quick and hard. I told him he needn't be sorry about it. I consider, when a fellow draws a knife, that hanging ain't too bad for him, whether he gets it into a man or not."

There was a growl of assent from two or three sailors standing round, for in those days the use of the knife was almost unknown in England, and was abhorrent to Englishmen, both as being cowardly and unfair, and as being a purely foreign crime.

"It will be dark before we get alongside," Mark said to the two detectives. "Do you two walk first; we will keep close behind you, and the others shall follow up as close as they can keep to us. If anyone is looking out for us, they will see that we are a strong party and that it would be no good to attack us, for even if they were to stab me it would not be possible to search me for the diamonds when I am with a party like this."

It was, indeed, quite dark when the brig brought up outside a tier of vessels lying by the wharf. A few oil-lamps burning by the quay showed that there were a good many people still sauntering about. The party waited until the rest of the passengers had landed. They learned from one of those who knew the place that the hotel to which they were going was but three or four hundred yards away, and obtained directions how to find it.

"Now we will go," Mark said. "Gibbons, you had better keep a sharp lookout on your own account. That fellow you knocked down may try to put a knife into you."

"I will keep a sharp lookout, sir, never you fear."

"I think, Tring, you had better watch; he is more in danger than I am. Have you seen the man go on shore?"

"Yes, he was the very first to cross on to the next vessel," Tring said.

The loungers on the quay had gathered together to watch the passengers as they left the ship, and by the dim light from one of the oil-lamps it could be seen that the majority of them were of the roughest class. As they were passing through them, a man with a cry of rage sprang at Gibbons with an uplifted knife. Tring's fist struck him under the ear as he was in the act of striking, and he fell like a log. There was a cry of "Down with them!" and a rush of a score of men, most of whom were armed with heavy bludgeons.

The party was at once broken up, heavy blows were exchanged, the two pugilists rolling their assailants over like ninepins, but receiving several heavy blows from their assailants' clubs. A rush of five or six men separated Mark from the others. Those in front of him he struck down, but a moment later received a tremendous blow on the back of the head which struck him to the ground unconscious. His companions were all too busy defending themselves against their assailants to notice what had been done, and, as the attack had taken place in the centre of the roadway, behind the quay, there was no lamp, and the fight was taking place in almost total darkness.

By this time many people had run up at the sound of the fray. A minute later there was a cry that the watch were coming, and four or five men with lanterns emerged from one of the streets leading down to the quays and hurried towards the spot. The fight at once ceased, the men who had attacked mingled with the

crowd, and when the watch came up they found the five Englishmen clustered together and ten or twelve men lying on the ground.

The instant that the fight had ceased Dick Chetwynde asked, "Where is Mr. Thorndyke?"

No answer was given. The other four men simultaneously uttered exclamations of alarm. The crowd was thinning fast as the watch came up.

"What is all this about?" one of them said, in Dutch.

"Do any of you speak English?" Dick asked.

"I do," one of them said.

"We landed five minutes ago from that craft," continued Dick, "and as we came across we were attacked by a band of ruffians. An Englishman, one of our party, is missing."

"Whose bodies are these?" the watchman asked, raising his lantern and pointing to them.

"Perhaps Mr. Thorndyke is among them," Dick Chetwynd said.

The fallen figures were examined by the light of the lanterns. Mark was not among them. The watchmen uttered an exclamation of astonishment as they looked at the men's faces.

"What did you strike them with?" the one who spoke first asked.

"Struck them with our fists, of course," Gibbons replied. "They will do well enough; you need not bother about them, they will come round again presently. The question is, Where is Mr. Thorndyke?"

The whole of the lookers-on had dispersed, each fear-

ing that he might be charged with taking part in the outrage.

"This is a very serious matter," Chetwynd said. "We have every reason to believe that the attack was premeditated, for the gentleman who is missing was known to have some valuables on him; all these fellows ought to be taken and locked up and made to give an account of themselves. We are going to the Hotel d' Hollande, where you can find us at any time. I daresay some of these scoundrels are known to you, and that may give you a clue as to where Mr. Thorn-dyke is.

"I have but little hope that he will be found alive; no doubt he has been stabbed and his body carried off, so that they can search his clothes at their leisure. We came in a strong party to prevent the risk of an attack upon Mr. Thorndyke. Here is my card. It is of no use our attempting to search by ourselves, but if you will get these fellows taken to the watch-house, and will call at the hotel, we will join any party, and search where you think he has most likely been taken."

"I think, sir, you had better come with me to the watch-house, and see the lieutenant, and tell him what has happened."

"I will just take my friends to the hotel, and shall be back from there before you have got men to take these fellows away. If you will go to one of those ships and borrow a bucket, fill it with water, and empty it over each of them, you will find that will bring them to."

As soon as they arrived at the hotel Dick ordered a private room and five bedrooms.

"We have made a terrible mess of this, lads," he said, gloomily. "I don't say that it is the fault of either of us, but it is a horrible affair. I have not the least doubt that Mr. Thorndyke has been killed, and it is no satisfaction to us that we have pretty nearly done for a dozen of those scoundrels."

"I would not have had it happen for a £100, nor a £1000; if there had been daylight we could have licked a score of them in spite of their bludgeons, but they came with such a rush at us that we got separated before we were aware of it. I don't think that it was our fault. I feel as much ashamed as if I had thrown up the sponge in the ring at the end of the first round. To think that we came over here, four of us, and yourself, sir, on purpose to take care of Mr. Thorndyke, and are all well, save a few knocks with those sticks, and that Mr. Thorndyke was killed and carried off before we had been on shore five minutes. A better young fellow I never put on the gloves with." And Gibbons passed the back of his hand across his eyes.

"Well, I must be off, now," Chetwynd said. "I feel heartbroken over it; I have known him since we were boys together; but what makes it worse is that only three days ago he became engaged to be married. How we are going to take the news back God only knows."

As he hurried down the street towards the wharf, he saw a number of lanterns coming towards him, and ten or twelve watchmen came along escorting the prisoners, many of whose faces were covered with blood; then came four other watchmen carrying a body on a stretcher.

"One of them is dead," the watchman who had before spoken said to Dick. "A foreign seaman, a Lascar, I should say, from his colour; we found an open knife by his side."

"That is the man who began the fray," Chetwynd said. "He was on the point of stabbing one of my companions when another hit him under the ear."

"What!" the watchman said. "He must have been hit like the kick of a horse. All these prisoners seem to have been struck but once; two of them cannot speak. I think their jaws are broken; four of them have broken noses, and another has all his front teeth knocked out, while others are nearly as bad."

"I see you have brought with you some of their bludgeons," Dick said, pointing to one of the watchmen, who carried a great bundle of sticks over his shoulder.

"Yes, sir, twenty-three of them; it certainly seems to show that it was a planned thing. Most of these fellows' faces are so bruised that I cannot say who they are at present, but two or three are known as the worst ruffians in the city, and I have no doubt that we shall find that they all belong to the same gang."

By this time they had arrived at the watch-house, a building of considerable size; the prisoners were first lodged in a strong room with barred windows and very heavy doors, and then the watchman went with Chetwynd to the lieutenant's room. The officer had just returned, having hurried down with a reinforcement to the wharf as soon as he had heard of the fray, and tried to gather some information from the people who had gathered round, attracted by the lanterns of the watch.

He had already learned from the watchmen all they knew about the affair. As he spoke English well, he at once addressed Dick :

“This is a serious affair, sir.”

“A very serious affair, as, indeed, I am afraid that my dearest friend has been murdered.”

“Will you kindly give me the particulars?” the officer said, sitting down to the table with a pen in his hand.

Dick Chetwynd told him the story of how Mr. Thorn-dyke, having some very valuable jewels that he wished to dispose of, and believing that he would be attacked by a band of robbers, had asked him to accompany him, and had brought four detective officers and pugil-ists to protect him against any sudden attack.

“Ah, that accounts for the terrible blows that these fellows received,” the officer said. “And your friend, was he a strong man?”

“He was a man exceptionally strong, and a match for either of the pugilists that he brought over. I have no doubt that he was stabbed, though of course he might have been brought down by a blow from one of the bludgeons. He must have been completely in-sensible when carried off.

“The watchmen here tells me that three or four of these ruffians are known, and perhaps, if you will give orders for the blood to be washed off the others' faces, some more may be recognised and prove an aid in enabling you to form an idea where Mr. Thorndyke has been carried. I trust that you will send out a party to search for him. I and the four men with me will

gladly join them, and may be of use if any resistance is offered."

The lieutenant at once gave orders to the watchman to go down and see that the prisoners all washed their faces. As soon as he returned with the report that this was done the officer went down with Dick Chetwynd to examine them. Three or four of the men with lanterns also went in. Eight out of eleven men were recognised; the other three, whose features were so swollen that they could not see out of their eyes, could not be made out, but their companions, on being questioned, gave their names.

"They all belong to a gang of wharf thieves and plunderers. They live in a slum near the water. I will have men posted in the lanes leading to it, and will myself go with you to see that a search is made of every house; but first I will try to find out from these fellows where he was to be taken. Now, my men," he said, "any one of you who will tell me where one of the party you attacked was to be taken will find things made easy for him at his trial."

None of the men spoke for a minute, and then one said,—

"We know nothing about it; how should we, when we were all knocked about?"

"No; but you might know where he was to be taken."

"I know nothing about that. We all got word to mind we were on the wharf when a brig, that was seen coming up, came alongside, and that we were to have a hundred francs each for attacking some of the pas-

sengers as they landed. Six of them came along together, and one said, 'These are the men.' A black sailor came up first and spoke to two or three men in some foreign language. I don't know who the men were, it was too dark to see their faces. It was one of them who gave the order. It seemed an easy job enough when there were twenty-five of us with heavy sticks, but it didn't turn out so. I only know that I hit one big fellow a blow that ought to have knocked him down, and the next moment there was a crash, and I didn't know anything more about it until a lot of water was thrown over me, and one of the watch helped me to my feet. I don't know whether the others know more than I do, but I don't think they do."

All the others protested at once that they were equally ignorant. They had gone to earn a hundred francs. They had been told that the money was all right, but who found it or who were the men to be attacked they had not the least idea.

"How was it that you all had these bludgeons?—there were no knives found on any of you."

The man who spoke before said,—

"The order was, 'No knives,' and before we went down to the wharf each of us was searched and sticks given to us. I suppose from that, that whoever paid for the job didn't want blood to be shed; it suited us well enough, for it was a job there was sure to be a row over, and I don't suppose any of us wanted to put his head in a noose. I know that we all said to one another as we went out that it did not want such sticks as we had to give a man a thrashing, but the man who hired

us, whoever he was, knew his customers better than we did."

The officer translated the man's words as they were spoken to Dick, and on hearing the last speech, the latter said,—

"Then there is still hope that Thorndyke may only have been stunned ; that is a greater reason for our losing no time in looking for him, for I am afraid that they won't hesitate to kill him when they have got him hidden away."

"I expect," the lieutenant said, "they thought that if any of the watch came upon them as they were carrying him off, they might be at once arrested if it was found that they were carrying a dead man, whilst if he were only stunned they would say that it was a drunken comrade who had fallen and knocked his head against something. I agree with you, sir ; we had better start on our search at once."

"Will you pass the Hotel d' Hollande ? If not, I will run and bring my men."

"Yes, I will go that way ; it will be no farther."

Dick walked on fast.

"We have no news of him," he said, as he entered the room where the four men were anxiously awaiting him, "but we and the watch are now going to search the slums where the men who were taken prisoners all live ; come down now, and I will tell you what I have learned before the others come up. There is reason for believing that he was not stabbed," he went on, as they reached the street, "for the men all say that they were armed only with clubs, and that the strictest orders were

given that none were to carry knives, therefore they have little doubt that he was at the time only stunned. I am bound to say that this gives me very small ground for hoping that we may find him alive. I fear they only stunned him so they might carry him to their haunts, for if stopped, they could say it was a drunken comrade who had fallen and hurt himself. I fear that when they once get him into one of their dens they will make short work of him ; therefore it is clear that there is not a moment to be lost. Ah, here comes the watch."

There were eight men with the lieutenant.

"I have already sent off ten others," he said, as he joined Chetwynd, "to watch the lanes and let no one go in or out. I thought it best not to lose a moment about that, for when the men see that we have learnt from the others where the gang came from, and have closed the avenues of escape, they will hesitate about murdering their prisoner if he is still alive when my men get there."

In a quarter of an hour they arrived at the end of a narrow lane where two watchmen were standing with lanterns.

"You have seen or heard nothing?" the lieutenant asked him.

"No, sir ; we have not seen a man moving in the lane."

"There is just one hope that we might be in time," the lieutenant said, as he went on down the lane, "and that is, that the fellows, when they gather, will be so dismayed at finding that nearly half their number are missing, and know that some of them are pretty sure to make a clean breast of it, that they will hesitate to complete

their crime. It is one thing to rob a man in the streets ; quite another to murder him in cold blood. There is likely to be a good deal of difference of opinion among them, some of the more desperate being in favour of carrying the thing through, but others are sure to be against it, and nothing may have been done. You may be sure that the sight of my men at the end of the lanes will still further alarm them. I have no doubt the news that we have surrounded the district has already been circulated, and that if alive now he is safe, for they will think it better to suffer a year or two's imprisonment than to be tried for murder. We are sure to make some captures, for it is probable that several of the others will bear marks of the fight. Each man we take we will question separately ; one or other of them is pretty safe to be ready to say where your friend was taken, if I promise him that he shan't be prosecuted."

Every house in the district was searched from top to bottom. Six men, with cut and bruised faces, were found shamming sleep, and were separately questioned closely. All declared that they knew nothing whatever of anyone being carried there.

"It is of no use your denying your share in the affair," the lieutenant said. "Your comrades have confessed that there were twenty-five of you hired to commit this outrage, and that you received a hundred francs each. Now, if this gentleman is not found it will be a hanging matter for some of you, and you had better tell all you know. If you will tell us where he is, I will promise that you shan't be included in the list of those who will be prosecuted."

The reply, though put in different words, was identical with that of the prisoners.

"We had nothing to do with carrying him off. We were hired only to knock the men down who were pointed out to us. Not a word was said about carrying them off. He may have been carried off; that we cannot say; but he has certainly not been brought here, and none of us had anything to do with it."

Morning was breaking before the search was concluded. The detectives, accustomed as they were to visit the worst slums of London, were horrified at the crowding, the squalor, and the misery of the places they entered.

"My opinion, Mr. Chetwynd," Gibbons growled, "is that the best thing to do would be to put a score of soldiers at the end of all these lanes, and then to burn the whole place down and make a clean sweep of it. I never saw such a villainous-looking crew in all my life. I have been in hopes all along that some of them would resist. It would have been a real pleasure to have let fly at them."

"They are a villainous set of wretches, Gibbons, but they may not be all criminals."

"Well, I don't know, sir; but I know that if I were on a jury, and any of the lot were in the dock, I should not want to hear any evidence against them; their faces are enough to hang them."

At last the search was over, and they were glad, indeed, when they emerged from the lanes and breathed the pure air outside, for all the Englishmen felt sick from the poisonous air of the dens that they had entered.

The prisoners, as they were taken had been sent off to the watch-house.

"I begin to think that the story these fellows tell is a true one, Mr. Chetwynd," the lieutenant said, "and that they had nothing to do with carrying your friend off. In the first place, they all tell the same story; that in itself would not be much, as it might have been settled beforehand; but it is hardly likely that one of the lot would not have been ready to purchase his life by turning on the others. There is very little honour among thieves; and as they know that we have taken their mates,—for no doubt we were watched as we marched them up the town,—they would make sure that someone would turn traitor, and would think they might as well be beforehand. I fancy that the men—whichever they are—who hired this gang to attack you, carried out that part of the business themselves."

"I am afraid that is so," Dick agreed; "and I fear in that case that he is in even worse hands than if these ruffians here had taken him."

"Well, sir, can you furnish us with any clue?"

"The only clue is that they were most probably dark men. That man who was killed was undoubtedly one of them. I should say that they would probably be got up as foreign sailors."

"Well, that is something to go upon, at any rate. I will send round men at once to all the places by the quays where sailors board, and if three or four of them have been together at any place we are sure to hear of it, and the moment I have news I will send to your hotel."

"Thank you ; I don't see that we can be of any use at present, but you will find us ready to turn out again the moment we hear that you have news."

When the party returned to the hotel they sat talking the matter over for upwards of an hour. All were greatly discouraged, for they had little hope, indeed, of ever learning what had become of Mark. As they had started out, Dick had told the night porter that he could not say what time they might return, but that before the house closed he must have a couple of bottles of spirits, and some tumblers sent up to their sitting-room, together with some bread and cold meat, for that they might not return until morning, and would need something before they went to bed, as they had had nothing since their dinner, at one o'clock.

"It wants something to take the taste of that place out of one's mouth," Tring said to Dick, as, directly they entered, he poured some spirits into the glasses. "I feel as queer as if I had been hocussed."

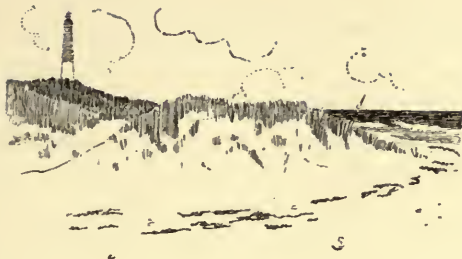
All, indeed, were feeling the same, and it was not until they had eaten their supper and considerably lowered the spirits in the two bottles that they began to talk. The two detectives were the principal speakers, and both of these were of opinion that the only shadow of hope remaining rested upon Mark himself.

"Unless they finished him before he came round," Malcolm said, "they would find him an awkward customer to deal with. Mr. Thorndyke has got his head screwed on right, and if, as you say, they are Indians, Mr. Chetwynd, I should think that if he once comes fairly round, unless he is tied up, he will be a match for

them, even with their knives ; that is the only chance I see. Even if the watch do find out that three or four foreign sailors have been at one of the boarding-houses and did not turn up last night, I don't think that we shall be much nearer. They will probably only have carried him some distance along the wharf, got to some quiet place where there is a big pile of wood or something of that sort, then put a knife into him, searched for the diamonds, which you may be sure they would find easily enough wherever he had hidden them, and then made off, most likely for Rotterdam or the Hague ; they could be at either of these places by this time, and will most likely divide the diamonds and get on board different craft, bound for London or Hull, or, indeed, any other port, and then ship for India. From what Mr. Thorndyke said, they did not want the diamonds to sell, but only to carry back to some temple from which they were stolen twenty years ago."

Chester was of precisely the same opinion.

"I am afraid, Mr. Chetwynd," he added, as they rose to go to their rooms for two or three hours' sleep, "the only news that we shall get in the morning is that Mr. Thorndyke's body has been found."



CHAPTER XIX.

AT ten o'clock a constable came with a message from the lieutenant to Mr. Chetwynd that he would be glad if he would come down to the watch-house. Dick did not wake the others, but freshening himself up by pouring a jug of water over his head, went at once with the constable.

"Have you news?" he asked, eagerly, as he entered.

"Yes, the men returned an hour ago. At each of four houses they went to a foreign sailor had been lodging for the last day or so, but yesterday afternoon all had paid their reckonings and left. Then the idea struck me that it would be as well to ask if they had been seen on the quays, and I sent off a fresh batch of men to make enquiries. A quarter of an hour ago one of them came back with the news that he had learned from a sailor that he had noticed a dark-coloured foreigner, whom he took to be a Lascar sailor, talking to a boatman, and that they had rowed off

together to a barge anchored a short way out ; he did not notice anything more about him.

“ Now, I should not be at all surprised if the fellow went off to arrange with the bargeman for a passage for himself and four or five comrades to some port or other ; it might be anywhere. It would make no difference to them where the barge was bound for. No doubt he saw the man again after the brig was sighted, and told him that they should come on board soon after it got dark, and told him to have the boat at the stairs. You see in that case they might not have carried Mr. Thorndyke above fifty or a hundred yards. They would probably get him on board as one of their party who had been drunk. The barge no doubt got under weigh about nine o'clock, which is the hour when tide was high last night, and during the night the Indians could easily drop your friend overboard—and may even have done so before they got under weigh, which would have been the easiest thing to do. There would have been no one at the helm, and they could have chosen a moment when the crew, probably only three, were below. I am afraid that this is not a cheering lookout, but I have little doubt that it is the correct one.

“ I have told my men to find out what barge was lying at the spot the sailor pointed out, and if we discover her name, which we are likely to be able to do, there will be no difficulty in finding out to whom she belongs, and where she was bound for. Then we can follow it up ; though there is little likelihood of our finding the murderers still on board.”

“ Thank you very much for the pains that you are

taking, sir," Dick said. "I am afraid that there is no shadow of hope of finding my poor friend alive. I have no doubt that the thing has happened exactly as you suggest ; the whole course of the affair shows how carefully it was planned, and I have no hope that any scruple about taking life would be felt by them for a moment. I will go back to the hotel, and I shall be obliged if you will let me know as soon as you obtain any clue as to the barge."

An hour and a half later the officer himself came round to the room where Dick Chetwynd and the two pugilists were sitting. The detectives had started out to make enquiries on their own account, taking with them a hanger-on at the hotel, who spoke English.

"The barge's name was the 'Julié,' " he said ; "she has a cargo on board for Rotterdam."

"I think the best thing would be to take a carriage and drive there at once," Dick said.

"You can do that, sir, but I don't think you will be there before the barge ; they have something like eighteen hours' start of you, and the wind has been all the time in the east. I should say that they would be there by eight o'clock this morning."

"No, I don't know that it would be of any use, but at least it would be doing something. I suppose we could be there in four hours?"

"From that to five ; but even if the barge were delayed and you got there first, which is very unlikely, I do not think that there would be the remotest chance of finding those villains on board. I reckon they would, as we agreed, launch the body overboard even

before they got under weigh here, and they may either have landed again before the craft got under weigh, pretending that they had changed their minds, and then walked across to the Hague or to Haarlem, or have gone on with the barge for two hours, or even until day-break. If by that time they were near Rotterdam, they may have stayed on board till they got there ; if not, they may have landed and finished the journey on foot ; but they would certainly not have stopped on board after six or seven o'clock in the morning. They would calculate that possibly we might get on their track at an early hour this morning and set out in pursuit at once.

“However, it will doubtless be a satisfaction to you to be moving ; and at least you will be able to overhaul the barge when you get to Rotterdam, and to hear what the boatmen say. The chances are they will not even have noticed that one of the men who came on board was missing. The men may very well have made up a long bundle, carried it on shore with them, or three of them may have carried a fourth ashore ; and in the dark the bargemen were unlikely to have noticed that the number was less than when they came on board. However, it will be something for you to find out when and where the fellows landed.”

“Yes ; I should certainly like to lay hands on them, though I am afraid we should find it very hard to prove that they had anything to do with this affair.”

“I think that also, Mr. Chetwynd. Morally, we may feel absolutely certain ; but, unless the boatmen noticed that one of their number was missing when they landed,

we have at present no evidence to connect them with it."

"We will set out as soon as my other two men return. I told them to be back soon after twelve. I will write to you this evening from Rotterdam. Ah! here are the men."

The door opened, and, to the stupefaction of the party, Mark Thorndyke entered the room.

"Good heavens, Mark!" Dick exclaimed, springing forward and seizing his hand. "Is it really you alive in the flesh? We had given you up for dead. We have been searching the town for you all night, and were just going to set out for Rotterdam in search of a barge on which we believed you were carried. Why, it seems almost a miracle."

The two prize-fighters also came forward and shook hands with a pressure that would have made most men shrink.

"I am as glad, Mr. Thorndyke," Gibbons said, "as if anyone had given me £1000. I have never quite given up hope, for, as I said to Mr. Chetwynd, if you got but a shadow of a chance you would polish off those nigger fellows in no time; but I was afraid that they never would give you a chance. Well, I am glad, sir."

"Mark, this is the lieutenant of the watch here," Dick said; "he has been most kind; and has himself headed the search that has been made for you all night. Now tell us all about it."

"First of all, give me something to drink, for, except some water, I have had nothing since dinner yesterday. You are right, Dick; it is almost a miracle, even to me,

that I am here. I would not have given a penny for my chance of life, and I can no more account for the fact that I am here than you can."

Mark drank off a tumbler of weak spirits and water that Gibbons poured out for him. Chetwynd rang the bell and ordered lunch to be brought up at once. Just at this moment the two detectives came in and were astonished and delighted at finding Mark there.

"Now," he said, "I will tell you as much as I know, which is little enough. When I came to my senses I found myself lying on the deck of a craft of some sort; it was a long time before I could at all understand how I got there. I think it was the pain from the back of my head that brought it to my mind that I must have been knocked down and stunned in that fight; for some time I was very vague in my brain as to that, but it all came back suddenly, and I recalled that we had all got separated. I was hitting out, and then there was a crash. Yes, I must have been knocked down and stunned, and I could only suppose that in the darkness and confusion I had been carried off and taken on board without any of you missing me; my hands and feet were tied, and there was something shoved into my mouth that prevented me from speaking.

"I should think that it must have been an hour before I quite recovered my senses, and got the thing fairly into my mind. Then a man with a knife leant over me, and made signs that if I spoke he would stab me, and another took the gag out of my mouth and poured some water down my throat, and then put it in again. I saw that he was a dark-coloured man, and I then

understood it all ; it was those Hindoos who had got up the attack upon us, and had carried me off. I had no doubt they had got the diamonds I had sewn up in the waistband of my trousers. I wondered why they were keeping me, but was sure they would stab me presently and throw me overboard. I knew that they had killed two soldiers for the sake of the diamonds, and if it hadn't been that they had given me the water, I should not have had a shadow of doubt about my fate.

"I puzzled over why they should have done so, and came to the conclusion that they dared not do it on board, because of the crew, and that they intended to take me on shore somewhere, and there dispose of me. I made many attempts to loosen my ropes, but they would not give the slightest. At last I think I dozed off for a time. After I had had the water they drew a blanket or something of that sort over me. It had been there before, but it had only been pulled up as high as my nose, and I felt sure that it was only done to prevent the Dutchmen on the boat seeing that I was bound and gagged ; this time they pulled it right over my face. When they took it off again I could see it was nearly morning, for there was a faint light in the sky. They were moving about on the deck, and presently I saw one of the sailors get into the boat and pull it along, hand over hand, by the rail until he was close to me. Then four Lascar sort of chaps—I could scarcely make out their features—lifted me and lowered me into the boat and got in themselves.

"I did not attempt to struggle. No doubt they had made up some tale that I was mad or something of that sort, and I thought that I had best pretend to be

quiet and peaceable till I could see some sort of chance of making a fight for it. It was but a few yards from the shore. The men lifted me out on to the bank, and the sailor then started to row back to the barge ; they carried me a few yards away, and then laid me face downwards on some grass. Now, I thought to myself, it is all over ; they are going to stab me and make off. To my surprise I felt that they were doing something—I could not make out what—to the ropes ; then there was quiet. I lay there I should think for half an hour, wondering why on earth they did not finish me. At last I made up my mind to move, and turned over on to my back. As I lay there I could see no one, and, raising my head, looked around. To my amazement I found that I was alone. It was now almost light, and as I craned my head in all directions I assured myself that they had gone ; then I began to try again at the ropes.

“To my surprise I found that they were much looser than they were before, although still tight enough to give me nearly an hour’s work before I got my hands free. Then it took me almost as long to get the ropes off my legs, for they had knotted them in such a fearful and intricate way that it was a long time before I could even discover where the ends were. At last I finished the job, stood up, and looked round. A quarter of a mile off there was a good-sized town, but not a soul could I see. Till now I had hardly thought of the diamonds. I put my hands to my waistband and found, as I expected, that they were gone. I think I felt nothing but pleasure : the confounded things had given trouble enough, and I was well rid of them. Why they



“ It took me almost as long to get the ropes off my legs.”

should have spared my life I could not imagine. If they had finished me, which they could have done without any risk to themselves when they got me ashore, they could have gone off with the diamonds without the slightest fear of pursuit, while now there was, of course, a chance that I might follow and recognise them."

"Would you know them again?" the lieutenant interrupted.

"Not in the slightest ; it was light enough to see that they were dark, but from the time the boat came along the blanket was over my head, and except when they gave me the water I had no chance of seeing any of their features. Still, if I had gone straight to the town I saw and reported the matter to the authorities, and sent mounted men to all the ports to warn them not to let any coloured men embark, I might have given them a lot of trouble, but I don't suppose any of them would ever have been caught. After the craft they had shown in the whole matter, it is certain that they would have laid their plans for escape so well that the law would never have laid hands upon them. I put my hand mechanically to my watch to see the time, and to my astonishment discovered that I still had it in my pocket, and was equally surprised to find that the money in my trousers' pockets was also untouched. The watch had, of course, stopped. I first of all went down to the water and had a good wash ; then I proceeded to the town, and, going to a hotel, ordered breakfast."

"Why, I thought you said that you had had nothing to eat, Mark."

"Yes? Well, I had forgotten all about that break-

fast. The people looked a good deal surprised at an Englishman walking in in that way. While I was eating my breakfast, two men—who were, I suppose, authorities of some kind—who spoke English came and questioned me. As I had made up my mind to say nothing more about the affair, I merely told them that I had come for a sail from Amsterdam, and that I wanted a carriage to take me back. They were evidently astonished at my choosing a dark night for such a trip, but I said that I had the curiosity to see how the boatmen navigated their vessel when there were no light-houses or anything to steer by. They asked a few more questions, and then went away, evidently thinking that I was a little mad. However, they must have spoken to the landlord, who in a short time made signs that the carriage was at the door.

“I had avoided asking the men either the name of the place or how far it was from any big town, because that would have made the whole affair more singular. It was quarter-past eight when I started, and beyond the fact that from the sun I know we came pretty nearly due east, I have not the slightest idea of the road. The coachman could not speak a word of English. I should say we came about seven miles an hour, and stopped once to bait the horses, so I suppose that I must have been between four and five miles from Rotterdam when I landed.”

Lunch had by this time been laid on the table, and at Dick's invitation the lieutenant joined them.

“It is an extraordinary story!” he said. “That your life should have been spared is altogether beyond my

comprehension ; still more so why they should have left you your money and watch."

"The whole story is extraordinary," Dick Chetwynd said ; "for we have every reason to believe that those fellows, or at least one or two of them, have been patiently watching for a chance of carrying off those diamonds for twenty years. When my friend told me of it ten days ago I did not believe that it could be possible ; but he has certainly shown that he was correct in his opinion."

Mark then related the history of the jewels, surprising the pugilists and detectives as much as the lieutenant.

"It is extraordinary, indeed," the latter said. "I should not have believed it possible that men could have devoted so many years to such a purpose, nor that they could have succeeded in tracing the diamonds in spite of the precaution taken by your uncle, and afterwards by yourself. It would seem that from the time he landed in England he, and after him your father and yourself, must have been watched almost night and day. I can understand now why they did not take your watch and money. They evidently acted from a sort of religious enthusiasm, and were no ordinary thieves, but, as evidently they did not hesitate to kill, I cannot understand why they should have added to their risks by sparing you."

"No ; that is what puzzles me," Mark agreed. "I was thinking it over while we were driving here. Now let me hear about the fight, Dick. How did you all come out of it?"

"As well as could be expected. Gibbons and Tring

both got some heavy blows with the cudgels, as, indeed, we all did more or less, but they did great execution. Eleven fellows were left senseless on the ground, and one of them, that black fellow who came over with us, was killed. The other ten are all in prison. All of us did our best, and managed to leave our mark on eight others, who were in consequence picked out, and are also in gaol." Dick went on to relate the particulars of the search.

"You see our friend here had traced you to the barge and found out her destination, and if you had come ten minutes later you would have found that we had all just started for Rotterdam. I was only waiting for Chester and Malcolm to return to set out. I am sorry, Mark, that you have lost your diamonds ; not so much because they are gone, for I can well understand you to be thoroughly glad to be rid of such dangerous articles, but because they should have carried them off in our teeth, after we had been specially retained to protect you. I certainly thought that with such a body-guard you were absolutely safe from any number of Hindoos."

"Yes, we made a regular mess of it, Mr. Thorndyke," Gibbons said. "I never felt so certain of winning a battle as I did that you would not be touched as long as we were looking after you. Tring and I, if we had been asked, would have said that we could each have taken on a dozen foreigners easily. Mr. Chetwynd is handy with his fists, too, though he hasn't your weight and reach, and your two other friends are both pretty well accustomed to deal with rough customers. As for Tring and me, it makes one feel small to know that we have

been bested by a handful of niggers, or Hindoos or whatever the chaps are, whom a good-sized boy of twelve ought to be able to polish off."

"Now, Mark, what is to be done next?" Dick Chetwynd asked.

"The next thing will be to get back as soon as we can, Dick. I, for one, have had enough of Holland to last me for a lifetime."

"I am afraid, gentleman," the lieutenant said, "you will have to wait a day or two before you can leave. I have eighteen men in prison, and will get a meeting of magistrates this afternoon. Now you have come back, Mr. Thorndyke, the charge against them won't be as serious as it would have been before, but they are guilty of a desperate and premeditated assault upon six passengers on their arrival here; they have already admitted that they were paid for their work, and as among them are some of the worst characters in the city, you may be sure that now we have got them fairly in our hands we shall not let them go. It is so simple an affair that the investigation ought not to take long, but we shall want to find out, if we can, who acted as the intermediary between the Hindoos and the prisoners. I should think that two meetings ought to be sufficient for the present, but I am afraid that there may then be a long remand, and that you will either have to remain here or to come over again."

"It would be a horrible nuisance," Dick said; "still it would be better to come back again than to wait here indefinitely, and anyhow I don't suppose it would be necessary for all of us to come back again."

"I should not mind if it could be arranged for me to be here again in a month's time," Mark agreed, "for, to tell you the truth, I am going to be married in less than three weeks, and as I had intended to come to Brussels and afterwards to travel for a while, I could make a visit here without greatly putting myself out."

"I will try and arrange that, Mr. Thorndyke."

"I shall be glad," Mark said, "if you can manage to get the men sentenced without going into the question of the diamonds at all, and treat the matter as a mere attempt at robbery. It surely would not be necessary to bring the question of my being carried away into the matter at all; I can give evidence that I was knocked down and stunned, and that I was robbed of some jewels that I had about me, which were the object of the attack."

"I think we should have to admit that," the lieutenant said; "it must come out that the attack was an organised one."

"Well, if it must, it must," Mark said, reluctantly; "but then, you see, no end of questions would be asked, and the thing might be delayed while a search is being made for the men who stole the bracelet."

"Well, we will keep it out of the question if we can," the lieutenant said; "the meeting will be at three o'clock; I will send a man to take you to the town hall."

At the appointed hour the party proceeded to the court, and the eighteen prisoners, under a strong guard, having been brought in, six magistrates took their places on the bench; the rest of the court was crowded, the

fray on the wharf and the number of captures having created quite a stir in the city. They had arranged that Tring should first give his evidence, which he did, the lieutenant of the watch acting as interpreter, though most of the magistrates understood English. The appearance of the prisoners created quite a sensation in the court, for the injuries that they had received were now even more conspicuous than they had been when they were first captured ; some of them had to be led into court, their eyes being completely closed ; others had their heads bandaged, and all showed signs of tremendous punishment. Tring related that he, with five others, had come ashore together ; one of his companions had a row on board a ship they had crossed in with a Lascar sailor, who was a passenger, and they kept together as they were crossing the wharf, thinking that possibly the man might attempt to stab his companion.

"I was walking behind him," Tring went on, "when the Lascar jumped suddenly out from among the men standing about, and was about to stab my companion, when I hit him just in time, and he went down ; then there was a rush, and we all got separated, and did as well as we could until the watch came up. That is all that I know about it."

"Is the Lascar among the prisoners?" one of the magistrates asked the lieutenant of the watch.

"No, sir. When picked up by one of my men he was found to be dead. The blow had apparently killed him instantly."

The other five then gave their evidence. It was similar to that of Tring, save that, being in front of

him, they knew nothing of the attack by the Lascar. All they knew about it was that there was a sudden rush upon them by a number of men armed with bludgeons, that they were separated, and that each defended himself until the guard came up.

Some of the watch then gave evidence, and told how, on arriving at the spot, eleven of the prisoners were found lying senseless ; how, on recovering, they were all taken to the watch-house, where several of them were recognised as notorious, bad characters. They had admitted that they were paid to make the attack, which was apparently the result of the private enmity of some person or persons unknown to one or more of those attacked.

The lieutenant then related the steps that he had taken to capture others connected with the attack, and that he found eight men bearing marks of the fray, and that all these were also notorious characters, and associates of the prisoners first taken. The first witnesses were again questioned. Five of them said that, so far as they knew, they had no personal enemies. Mark, who was the last to get into the witness-box, said that he himself had no enemies, but that an uncle of his, who was in the British Indian service, had a sort of feud with some members of a sect there on account of some jewels that he had purchased, and which had, they declared, been stolen from a temple. Two soldiers, through whose hands these things had passed, had been successively killed by them, and his uncle had to the day of his death believed that their vengeance would one day fall upon him.

"I can only suppose," continued Mark, "that I have inherited the enmity that they bore him as I inherited the jewels, and that the attack was really designed solely against me, and the consequences might have been fatal to me had it not been for the strength and courage of my fellow-passengers."

"Did they come with you for your protection, Mr. Thorndyke?"

"To some extent, yes. The fact is, that I have for some time been convinced that I was followed about by natives of India, and, remembering what my uncle had said on the subject, I became to some degree apprehensive, and thought it as well to leave London for a short time. That this attack was really instigated by the men I have no doubt whatever, since, as you have heard, it was begun by a Lascar, who tried to stab one of my companions, and who received a knock-down blow that caused his death from one of the others. It is a well-known fact that these people will cherish for many years a determination to avenge an injury. However, I hope that after the failure of this attempt upon my life I shall hear no more of them."

"Were any knives found on the prisoners?" the magistrates asked the lieutenant of the watch.

"No, sir; all carried clubs. And they told me that they had been specially ordered not to take knives, and had, indeed, been searched before they came out."

"What impression do you gather from that, Mr. Thorndyke?"

"My impression is, sir, that they desired to over-

power those with me and to beat them down, in order to carry out their revenge upon me."

After some consultation the magistrate who had before spoken said,—

"The prisoners will be remanded. It is necessary that we should find out who was the chief culprit who bribed this gang."

As soon as the prisoners were taken out of court Mark slipped across to the magistrates, accompanied by the lieutenant as interpreter.

"I hope, gentlemen, that our presence here will not be necessary, for it would be a matter of extreme inconvenience. I may say that my marriage is fixed for to-day three weeks, hence you can well imagine that I want to return as soon as possible. Two of the men are, as you have heard, Bow Street officers, whose presence could not well be spared."

The magistrates again consulted together.

"Your evidence has all been taken down by the clerk of the court. Certainly we should not require your presence at the remand; but that, of course, would depend upon whether these men all own their guilt, which, having been taken, as they may say, red-handed, it is likely enough they will do. We will consent, therefore, to your leaving, if you will give us an undertaking to return for the trial if your presence is at all necessary, and that you will bring with you the man who struck down the Lascar who commenced the fray, and one of the others."

"That I will do willingly," Mark replied. "We are much obliged to you for your consideration. I shall be

travelling for a time after my marriage ; but should I hear from you that our presence is required, I will give you the route I intend to take and the address at which letters will find me, and if you send me a sufficiently long notice I will at once return for the trial."



CHAPTER XX.

“**Y**OU managed that very well, Mark,” Dick said. “You kept well within the limits of truth without bring the real facts of the attack upon us into the case.”

“Well, you see, Dick, after working as I told you as a detective, one gets into the way of telling stories with the smallest amount of deviation possible. What will these fellows get done to them?”

“I should say that they will get two or three years’ imprisonment; the only charge now is rioting and assault. It is lucky for them that they had clubs instead of knives. It would have brought the matter under the head of attempted murder; the matter of the gems was not important in the case, but there is sure to be a great fuss and search for the missing Indians. I suppose you will soon be off home now?”

“Yes; I shall find out to-night what vessel leaves for England to-morrow, and take a berth in the first that sails for London. It is too late to think of starting this

evening, and, indeed, I feel that I want a long night's rest, for I did not sleep much last night, and have not quite recovered from that crack on my head."

On his return to the hotel Mark sent out a man to enquire at the shipping offices, and finding that a barque would sail at nine o'clock the next morning, they went down and took berths, and sailed in her next day. The voyage home was a rapid one, for the wind blew steadily from the east, and the vessel made the passage to the mouth of the river in two days, and the next took them up to London.

"I will call round to-morrow or next day, Gibbons, with the cheques for you both," Mark said, as he prepared to go ashore.

"No, sir. We are both of one mind that we could not take them. We went over to prevent you being robbed of those sparklers, and to see that you came to no harm. Well, the things are lost, and you have got knocked down and carried away. It is no thanks to us that you are alive now. It is a mortifying job that, with two detectives to watch over things and with us to fight, we should have been fairly beaten by a few black niggers."

"If there had been any bungling on your part, Gibbons, there might be something in what you say, but no one could have foreseen that before we had been on shore two minutes we should have been attacked in that way. You both did all that men could do, as was shown by the condition of the fellows who were taken. I was just as much separated from you as you were from me, and the fact that we were surprised as we were is

really due to my not determining to stay on board until the morning, which I could no doubt have done with the captain's permission. It never struck me for a moment that we should be attacked in force. I thought it probable that an attempt at assassination would be made, but it certainly did not seem probable that it would be attempted while you were all with me. You are not in the slightest degree to blame, for your part of the agreement was carried out to my satisfaction. I shall certainly carry out mine, as I have arrived home safe and sound."

"Well, governor, it is very good of you, but I tell you it will go against the grain for us to take your money."

On landing, Mark parted with Dick Chetwynd, who had arranged to drop Mark's bag at his lodgings on his way home, and at once took a hackney coach to Islington. Millicent gave a cry of delight as he entered the room.

"You are back earlier than I expected, Mark. You told me before you started that the wind was in the east, and that you might be a long time getting to Amsterdam unless it changed. I have been watching the vane on the church, and it has been pointing east ever since. Well you have sold the diamonds, I hope?" she said, after the first greeting was over.

"No ; I have bad news for you, Millicent : the jewels have been stolen."

"Well, it does not make much difference, Mark. We have much more than enough without them, so don't bother yourself in the least. How did it happen?"

"Well, it is rather a long story. I will tell it you

when Mrs. Cunningham is here, so as not to have to go over it twice. How are the dresses getting on?"

"I suppose they are getting on all right," she said. "I have done nothing for the last two days but try them on. You see, we put them out to three milliners, and they all three seem to reach the same point together, and I start after breakfast, and it takes about two hours at each place. You don't know what trouble you have given me by hurrying things on so unreasonably."

"Well, it is better to have it all done and over," he said, "than to have the thing hanging over you for a couple of months."

"That is what Mrs. Cunningham says. Now, I want to hear about your adventures, and I will call her down. Only think, Mrs. Cunningham," Millicent said, presently, with a laugh, after she had returned with her, "this silly boy has actually let the diamonds be stolen from him."

"No; really, Millicent!"

"Yes, indeed. Fancy his not being fit to be trusted to look after them. However, I tell him it is of no consequence. I don't know how they went. He would not tell me the story till you came down."

"I am sorry to say it is true, Mrs. Cunningham, although I can assure you that I really cannot blame myself for either carelessness or stupidity. I knew when I started that there was a very great risk, and took what seemed to me every possible precaution, for, in addition to Dick Chetwynd going with me, I took two detectives from Bow Street and two prize-fighters."

Exclamations of surprise broke from both ladies.

"And yet in spite of all that these things were stolen,"

Millicent said. "How on earth did they do it? I should have sewn them up in my pockets inside my dress."

"I sewed them up in the waistband of my trousers, Millicent, and yet they managed in spite of us to steal them. And now I must begin by telling you the whole history of those diamonds, and you will understand why I thought it necessary to take a strong party with me."

He then told them, repeating the history the colonel had given his father of the diamonds and the conviction that he had, that he had been followed by Hindoos, and the instructions he had given for the disposal of the bracelet.

"As you know," he said, "nothing happened to confirm my uncle's belief that there were men over here in search of the diamonds during my father's life, but since then I have come to the same conclusion that he had, and felt positive that I was being constantly followed wherever I went. As soon as I heard where the treasure was I began to take every precaution in my power. I avoided going to the bank after my first visit there, and, as you know, would not bring the things for you to look at. I got Dick Chetwynd to go there, open the case, and take out these diamonds. He did not bring them away with him then, but fetched them from there the morning we started. He went down and took the passage for us both at the shipping office, and the pugilists and the detectives each took passage for themselves, so that, as I hoped, however closely I was followed, they would not learn that I was taking them to Amsterdam."

"It was very wrong, Mark, very wrong, indeed,"

Millicent broke in. "You had no right to run such a terrible risk. It would have been better for you to have taken the diamonds and thrown them into the Thames."

"That would not have improved matters," he said. "The Indians would not have known that I had got rid of them, and would have continued their efforts to find them, and I should always have been in danger instead of getting it done once for all. However, I did not think that there was any danger, going over as I did with two of the best prize-fighters in England, to say nothing of the detectives, who were the men who were with me when I caught Bastow. The only danger was that I might be stabbed. But, as they would know, it was no use their stabbing me unless they could search me quietly, and that they could not do unless I was alone and in some lonely neighbourhood, and I had made up my mind not to stir out unless the whole party were with me. I found out when I got on board that, in spite of all the precautions I had taken, they had discovered that I was going to sail for Amsterdam, which they could only have done by following Dick as well as myself. There was a dark-faced foreign sailor, who I had no doubt was a Hindoo, already on board, and I saw another in a boat watching us start. This was unpleasant; but, as I felt sure that they could not have known that I had with me detectives and pugilists, I still felt that they would be able to do nothing when I got to Amsterdam."

Then he told them the whole story of the attack, of his being carried away, and of his unexpected release;

of the search that had been made for him, and the arrest of eighteen of his assailants.

Millicent grew pale as he continued, and burst into tears when she heard of his being a prisoner in the hands of the Hindoos.

"I shall never let you go out of my sight again, Mark," she exclaimed, when he had finished. "It was bad enough before when you were searching for that man here, and I used to be terribly anxious, but that was nothing to this."

"Well, there is an end of it now, Millicent; the men have got the diamonds, and will soon be on their way to India, if they have not started already."

"Nasty things," she said, "I shall never like diamonds again; they will always remind me of the terrible danger that you have run. Isn't it extraordinary that for twenty years four or five men should be spending their lives waiting for a chance of getting them back?"

"I do not expect there were so many as that; probably there was only one. He would have no difficulty in learning that my father had not received any extraordinary gems from my uncle, and probably supposed that they would not be taken out from wherever they might be until you came of age. After the death of my father he might suppose that I should take them out, or that, at any rate, I should go to whoever had them, and see that they were all right, and he would then hire perhaps half a dozen Lascars,—there are plenty of them at the docks,—and have watched me wherever I went; and do you know that I believe I once owed my life to them."

"How was that, Mark?"

"Well, I was captured by some fellows who suspected me to be a Bow Street runner, and I think that it would have gone very hard with me if a party of five or six prize-fighters had not broken into the house, pretty nearly killed the men in whose hands I was, and rescued me. They said that they had heard of my danger from a foreign sailor, who called at Gibbons's, with whom I was in the habit of boxing, and told him about it. You see, until they learned where the jewels were, my life was valuable to them, for possibly I was the only person who knew where they were hidden ; so really I don't think I have any reason for bearing a grudge against them. They saved my life in the first place, and spared it at what was a distinct risk to themselves. On the other hand, they were content with regaining the bracelet, not even, as I told you, taking my watch or purse. You see with them it was a matter of religion. They had no animosity against me personally, but I have no doubt they would have stabbed me without the slightest compunction had there been no other way of getting the things. Still, I think I owe a debt of gratitude to them rather than the reverse, and, after all, the loss of the bracelet is not a serious one to us."

"I am glad it is gone," Millicent, said ; "you say it had already caused the death of two men, and if you had succeeded in selling it, I cannot help thinking that the money would have brought ill-fortune to us. I am heartily glad that they are gone, Mark. I suppose they were very handsome."

"They were magnificent," he said. "Dick and Cot-

ter both agreed that they had never seen their equal, and I fancy that they must have been worth a great deal more than your father valued them at."

"Well, it does not matter at all ; there is no history attached to the others, I hope, Mark ?"

"Not in any way, dear. They were bought, as the colonel told my father, in the ordinary course of things, and some no doubt were obtained at the capture of some of the native princes' treasuries, but it was solely on account of this bracelet that he had any anxiety. You can wear all the others if you have a fancy for keeping them, without a shadow of risk."

"No, Mark, we will sell them every one. I don't think that I shall ever care to wear any jewels again ; and if I am ever presented at court and have to do so, I would rather that you should buy some new ones fresh from a jeweller's shop than wear anything that has come from India."

"To-morrow you shall both go to the bank with me to see them, and then I will take them to some first-class jeweller's and get him to value them."

The visit was paid next day. Both Millicent and Mrs. Cunningham were somewhat disappointed at the jewels.

"It is hardly fair to see them like this," Philip Cotter said. "They would look very different if reset. No Indian jewels I have ever seen show to advantage in their native settings ; but many of the stones are very large, and without knowing anything about them I should say that they are fully worth the £25,000 at which you say Colonel Thorndyke valued them. He

was not likely to be mistaken. He was evidently a judge of these matters, and would hardly be likely to be far wrong."

"We will go with you to the jewellers, Mark," Millicent said. "In the first place, I shall not feel quite comfortable until I know that they are out of your hands, and in the next place I should like to hear what he thinks of them."

"I have a number of Indian jewels that I wish you to value for me," Mark said, as, carrying the case, he entered the jeweller's shop. They were collected by Colonel Thorndyke, an uncle of mine, during service in India."

The jeweller took them with him into a room behind the shop. The case was opened, and the man took out sixty-eight small parcels it contained, and opened them one after the other.

"I shall need a very careful examination of these before I can form any estimate of their value," he said, after inspecting some of the more important pieces of jewelry carefully. "They are a most magnificent collection, and had they been properly cut in the first place they would have been worth a very large sum. Unfortunately, the Indian princes think more of size than of lustre, and have their stones cut very much too flat to show off their full brilliancy. Some of these large ones I should certainly advise to be recut, for what they will lose in weight they will gain in beauty and value. However, sir, I will go through them and give you an estimate of the selling value of each piece. I need not say that they ought all to be reset in the

prevailing fashion, but the gold, which is in some cases unnecessarily massive, will go some distance towards defraying the expense."

"When shall I call again?" Mark asked.

"I should be glad if you can give me a week," the jeweller said. "Some of the things, for instance that great pearl necklace, I could appraise without much difficulty, but all the gems must be taken out of their settings before I could form a fair idea of their value."

"Then I will call in a week's time," Mark said. "I am in no particular hurry about them, but I would rather that they were in your care than mine."

"Yes ; if the cracksmen got word that there was such a collection as this in any private house it would need a couple of men with pistols to keep guard over them."

A week later Mark again called.

"I have the list ready for you, sir ; you will see that they are not marked according to their setting, but according to their size and value. Thus, you see, the largest stones are priced separately ; the smaller ones are in groups according to their weight. The total comes to £42,000. I do not know whether that at all equals your expectations. I may say that I have shown the stones to two or three of our principal diamond merchants, and that the prices I have put down are those at which they would be willing to buy them ; possibly some would be worth more. I had the merchants here together, and they spent some hours going through them, and the sums put down are those at which one or other were willing to purchase."

"It quite answers my expectations," Mark said. "My uncle's estimate, indeed, was somewhat lower, but, doubtless he judged them at the price which they would fetch in India. Well, sir, I authorize you to close with the offers, and to dispose of them for me. I will give you a written authority to do so. In the meantime, I wish to buy a suite of jewels as a wedding-present, a tiara, necklace, and bracelets; but I do not want any diamonds to be among them."

"I am afraid I have nothing in stock without diamonds; of course, I have both necklaces and bracelets of almost any stones that you might select, but I have no complete set without diamonds; the effect would be sombre, and few ladies would like them."

"We have some unpleasant associations with diamonds," Mark said, "and on that point I am quite determined; but if you used pearls instead of diamonds the effect might be as good. I don't care whether the stones are emeralds or rubies; at any rate, I should like to see some, and then perhaps you might be able to make me a set on the same model."

Several superb sets were brought in; Mark selected one of emeralds and diamonds.

"What would be the price of this set?" he asked.

"That set is £6000, sir; the stones are exceptionally fine ones; but if you substituted pearls of equal size for the diamonds, it would cost considerably less; I could not give you the exact price until it is made, but I should say that it would be about £4500."

"Very well, then, I will take that. How long will it be making?"

"I should not like to say less than three months at the earliest ; it will require some time to collect as fine a set of emeralds as these. Indeed, I think that most probably I shall use these emeralds, or the greater part of them, and collect others to take their places at my leisure. I do not know but that the best plan would be to take the diamonds out and substitute pearls ; there would be no difficulty in getting them, and in that case I might have them ready for you in a month."

"I think that will be the best plan ; but you need not be in any particular hurry about them, my marriage will take place in less than a fortnight, and after that it will probably be two or three months before I return to London ; I will get you to keep the things until I come back."

"I have sold the jewels, Millicent," he said, when he returned to Islington ; "the jeweller has found purchasers for them all, and the total comes to £42,000."

Millicent's eyes opened in surprise.

"Whatever shall we do with all our money, Mark ?"

"I rather wonder myself, dear. However, there is one thing, there are always plenty of people who will be glad to relieve us of anything that we don't want. I can tell you that in the course of my search for Bastow I have seen an amount of poverty and misery such as I never dreamt of, and I certainly should like to do something to relieve it. The best thing that I know of would be to give a handsome sum to three or four of the great hospitals. I don't know of any better means of helping the very poor."

"Suppose, Mark," the girl said, putting her hand on

his arm, "we give this £42,000 as a thank-offering. We never expected to get it, and my father's jewels have nearly cost you your life. We have such an abundance without it, that I should like, above all things, to give this money away."

"I think that is an excellent plan, Millicent, and a very happy thought on your part. We cannot do it now, as we have not yet got the money, but as soon as we do, we will send off cheques for ten thousand guineas each to St. Bartholomew's, Guy's, and St. Thomas's, those are the three principal ones; the other we can settle afterwards. But I should say that the Foundling would be as good as any, and I believe that they are rather short of funds at present; then there is the London Mendicity Society, and many other good charities. Perhaps it would be better to divide the whole among eight of them instead of four; but we need not settle that until we return."

"Do you think we shall have to go to this horrid Amsterdam, Mark?"

"I hope not, dear; but I shall no doubt hear from the lieutenant of the watch during the next week or ten days."

When the letter came it was satisfactory. The prisoners, seeing the hopelessness of any defence, had all admitted their guilt, and the name of the man who had dealt with them had also been given up. Except in his case there would be no trial. The others would have sentences passed on them at once, and the three, who had been promised comparatively slight punishment, had gone in the box to give evidence against the man

who had engaged them. Before starting for Holland, Mark had consulted Millicent as to whether she would prefer being married in London or at Crowswood. She had replied,—

“I should greatly prefer Crowswood, Mark. Here we know no one; there we should be among all our friends; certainly if we don't go we must get Mr. Greg to come up and marry us here. I am sure he would feel very disappointed if anyone else were asked. At the same time I should not like to go home. When we come back from our trip it will be different; but it would be a great trial now, and however happy we might be I should feel there was a gloom over the house.”

“I quite agree with you, Millicent. When we come back we can see about entirely refurnishing it, and, perhaps, adding some rooms to it, and we need not go down until a complete change has been made. We shall be able to manage it somehow or other, and I quite agree with you that anything will be better than going back to the house for a day or two before the wedding.”

On the voyage back from Holland Mark had talked the matter over with Dick Chetwynd, and said that he thought of taking rooms for Mrs. Cunningham and Millicent at Reigate and stopping at the hotel himself, and having the wedding-breakfast there.

“Of course, Dick, you will be my best man.”

“I should think so,” Dick laughed. “Why, if you had asked anyone else I should have made a personal matter of it with him, and have given him the option

of resigning the position or going out with me. But your other plans are foolish, and I shall take the matter into my own hands ; I shall insist upon the two ladies coming down to the Park, and I will get my aunt to come and preside generally over things. I shall fill up the house with bridesmaids and that sort of thing, and shall have a dance the evening before. You can put up at the hotel if you like, but you know very well that there are a dozen houses where they will be delighted to have you ; there is no doubt that when they know what is coming off you will get a dozen invitations, and then after church all those invited will drive off to the Park to the wedding-breakfast. After that is over you can start in a post-chaise to Canterbury or Dover, wherever you may decide to make your first halt."

"But my dear Dick, I could not put you to all this trouble !"

"Nonsense, man. I should enjoy it immensely ; besides, I shall be really glad of a good reason to try and open the doors of the Park again. I have been there very little since my father's death, and I think I shall make it my head-quarters in future. I am getting rather tired of bachelor life in London, and must look out for a wife ; so nothing could be more appropriate than this idea. Don't bother yourself any further about it. I shall ride down and establish myself there to-morrow, spend a couple of days in driving round to our friends, and in sending out invitations. I shall still have nearly a fortnight for making all preparations. Why, it will cause quite an excitement in the neighbourhood. I shall be hailed as a benefactor, and I shall let every-

one know that your father's ward was really your cousin, but that by the will of her father she was to drop her surname until she came of age, and that until that time your father was to have the entire control of the property. I shall add that, although the estate, of course, is hers, your uncle has left you a very large fortune, and that nothing could be more suitable in all respects than the marriage."

"That will do excellently, Dick ; that will be quite enough, without going into details at all. You can mention that we intend to have the house entirely refurnished, and on the return from our wedding-trip abroad to settle there. I am sure I am extremely obliged to you for your offer, which will certainly clear away all sorts of small difficulties."

A day or two after his return, Mark wrote to Mr. Greg, telling him the relations in which Millicent and he stood to each other, and of the near approach of their marriage. He said that Millicent would be married from Dick Chetwynd's, but that it would be at Crowswood church. In return, he received a warm letter of congratulation from the rector, telling him that the news was in every respect delightful, and that his wife and the children were in a state of the highest excitement, not only at the marriage, but at their coming down to reside again at Crowswood.

"The village," he said, "will be scarcely less pleased than I am ; for though everything goes on as you ordered, and the people get their milk, broths, and jellies as before, they don't look at it as the same thing as it was in the old days. I cannot say that the news of your engage-

ment to Miss Conyers—I ought to say Miss Thorndyke—is surprising, for I had thought that it would be quite the natural thing for you to fall in love with each other, and, indeed, my wife declares that she saw it coming on distinctly during the last few months before you left here. Your postscript, saying that Bastow had been captured and had committed suicide, gave me a distinct feeling of relief, for no one could tell whether the deadly enmity that he felt for your father might not extend to you. I have cut this note rather short, but I have just heard the door shut, and I am quite sure that my wife has gone down to tell the good news in the village, and I really cannot deny myself the pleasure of telling some of the people and seeing their faces brighten up at the news.”

As Dick had foretold would be the case, Mark received a very warm letter from Sir Charles Harris, congratulating him upon his approaching marriage, and insisting upon his taking up his quarters with him.

“I am sending a man down with this to hand it to the guard as the up coach goes through the town. Chetwynd told me that his call on me was the first he had paid, so I feel fairly confident that I shall forestall the rest of your friends and that you will give me the pleasure of your company.”

Mark wrote back accepting the invitation at once, which enabled him to decline half a dozen others without the necessity of making a choice. Everything turned out as arranged. Millicent and Mrs. Cunningham went down in a post-chaise two days before the wedding, and Mark drove down in his gig with them. Dick Chet-

wynd met them on horseback just outside Reigate, and escorted the ladies to his house, Mark driving on to that of Sir Charles Harris. Millicent found the house full of her special friends, whom she had asked to be her bridesmaids. She was almost bewildered by the warmth of their welcome, and overpowered by the questions poured upon her.

"The news quite took all our breath away, Millicent," one of them said ; "it seems extraordinary that you should have been Miss Thorndyke all the time, though I don't think that any of us were at all surprised that you should take the name now ; you must have been surprised when you heard that you were the heiress of Crowswood."

"I was a great deal more disgusted than surprised," she said, rather indignantly. "I did not think that it was fair at all that I should step into Mark's shoes."

"Well, it has all come right now, Millicent, and I dare say you thought that it would, even then."

"I can assure you that I did not ; quite the contrary, I thought that it never would come right. I was very unhappy about it for a time."

"Now, young ladies," Dick Chetwynd laughed, "will you please take Mrs. Cunningham and Miss Thorndyke up to their rooms. I don't suppose I shall see any more of you before dinner time ; there are those trunks to be opened and examined, talked over and admired. Mind, I have fifteen more, for the most part men, coming to dinner, so those of you who aspire to follow Miss Thorndyke's example had best prepare yourselves for conquest."

The ball on the following evening was a great success. Dick had determined that it should be a memorable one, and there was a consensus of opinion that it was the most brilliant that had taken place in that part of the country for many years.

Crowswood church and village presented a most festive appearance on the following day; there was not a cottage that had not great posies of flowers in its windows, and that had not made some sort of attempt at decoration with flags or flowers. A huge arch of evergreens, with sheaves of wheat and flowers, had been erected on the top of the hill, and every man, woman, and child turned out in their best and cheered lustily, first, when Mark drove up in his gig, and then when the Chetwynd carriage, drawn by four grey horses, dashed merrily by, containing the bride, bridesmaids, and friends. The church was already crowded, and Mr. Greg was visibly moved at seeing the son and niece of the man to whom he owed his living made man and wife. When the wedding-breakfast, at which more than fifty sat down, and the necessary toasts were over, Mr. and Mrs. Thorn-dyke started for Canterbury.



CHAPTER XXI.

IT was not until Easter that Mark Thorndyke and his wife returned to England. They had spent the greater portion of that time in Italy, lingering for a month at Venice, and had then journeyed quietly homewards through Bavaria and Saxony. They were in no hurry, as before starting on their honeymoon Mark had consulted an architect, had told him exactly what he wanted, and had left the matter in his hands. Mrs. Cunningham had from time to time kept them informed how things were going on. The part of the house in which the Squire's room had been situated was entirely pulled down and a new wing built in its stead. Millicent had been specially wishful that this should be done.

"I don't know that I am superstitious, Mark," she had said, "but I do think that when a murder has taken place in a house it is better to make a complete change. The servants always think they see or hear something. That part of the house is avoided, and it is difficult to

get anyone to stay there. I think it is very much more important to do that than it is to get the house refurnished ; we can do anything in that way you like when we get back, but I should certainly like very much to have the great alteration made before we return."

The architect was a clever one, and the house, which was some two hundred years old, was greatly improved in appearance by the new wing, which was made to harmonise well with the rest, but was specially designed to give as much variety as possible to the general outline. Millicent uttered an exclamation of pleasure when they first caught a glimpse of the house. As they rode through the village they were again as heartily welcomed as they were on their wedding-day. Mrs. Cunningham received them ; she had been established there for a month, and had placed the house entirely on its old footing. They first examined the new portion of the house, and Millicent was greatly pleased with the rooms that had been prepared for them, Mark having requested Mrs. Cunningham to put the furnishing into the hands of the best-known firm of the day.

"I have asked," Mrs. Cunningham said, "the rector and his wife and Mr. Chetwynd to dine with us this evening ; they can scarcely be termed company, and I thought that you might find it pleasant to have these old friends here the first evening. There is a letter for you on the library table, Mark ; it may almost be called a packet ; it has been here nearly a month."

In our days a newly married couple would find on their return from foreign travel basketfuls of letters,

circulars, and catalogues from tradesmen of all kinds ; happily our forefathers were saved from these inflictions, and Mark at once went to the library with almost a feeling of surprise as to who could have written to him. He saw at once that it was a ship's letter, for on the top was written, "Favoured by the 'Surinam.'"

"Why it is Ramoo's writing. I suppose he gave it to someone he knew, and that instead of its being put in the mail-bag in India he brought it on with him. What a tremendously long epistle," he exclaimed, glancing his eye down the first page, and then a puzzled expression came across his face ; he sat down and began to read from the first slowly and carefully.

"HONOURED SAHIB,—I do not know why I should write to tell you the true history of all these matters. I have thought it over many times, but I feel that it is right that you should know clearly what has happened, and how it has come about, and more especially that you should know that you need never fear any troubles such as those that have taken place. I am beginning to write this while we are yet sailing, and shall send it to you by ship from the Cape, or if it chances that we meet any ship on her way to England, our letters may be put on board her."

"Why, this letter must be more than a year old," Mark said to himself. There was no date to the letter, but, turning to the last sheet, he saw, as a postscript after the signature, the words : "January 26. A ship, the 'Surinam,' is lying a short distance from us, and will take our letters to England."

"Yes, it must be a year old ; but what he means by the way he begins is more than I can imagine." And he turned back to the point at which he had broken off.

"I would tell it you in order as it happened. I, Ramoo, am a Brahmin. Twenty years ago I was the head priest of a great temple. I shall not say where the temple was ; it matters not in any way. There was fighting, as there is always fighting in India. There were Company's Sepoys and white troops, and one night the most sacred bracelet of the great god of our temple was stolen."

"Good heavens !" Mark exclaimed, laying down the letter. "Then it has been Ramoo who has all this time been in pursuit of the diamonds ; and to think that my uncle never even suspected him !" Then suddenly he exclaimed, "Now I understand how it was that my life was spared by those fellows. By Jove, this is astounding !" Then he took up the letter again.

"Two of the Brahmins under me had observed, at a festival the day before the bracelet was lost, a white soldier staring at it with covetous eyes. One of them was in charge of the temple the night following. He came to me and said, 'I desire to devote my life to the recovery of the jewels of the god. Bondah will go with me ; we will return no more until we bring them back.' 'It is good,' I said ; 'the god must be appeased, or terrible misfortunes may happen.' Then we held a solemn service in the temple. The two men removed the caste marks from their foreheads, prostrated themselves before

the god, and went out from amongst us as outcasts until the day of their death. Two months later a messenger came from the one who had spoken to me, saying that they had found the man, but had for a long time had no opportunity of finding the bracelet. Then Bondah had met him in a lonely place and had attacked him. Bondah had lost his life, but the soldier was, though sorely wounded, able to get back to his regiment. He had died, but he had, the writer was convinced, passed the jewels on to a comrade whom he would watch. Then I saw that one man was not sufficient for such a task. Then I, too, the Chief Brahmin of the Temple, saw that it was my duty to go forth also.

"I laid the matter before the others, and they said, 'You are right; it is you who, as the chief in the service of the god, should bring back his jewels.' So again there was a service, and I went forth as an outcast and a wanderer, knowing that I must do many things that were forbidden to my caste; that I must touch unclean things, must eat forbidden food, and must take life if needs be. You, sahib, cannot understand how terrible was the degradation to me, who was of the purest blood of the Brahmins. I had taken the most solemn vows to devote my life to this. I knew that whether successful or not, although I might be forgiven my offence by the god, yet that never again could I recover my caste, even though the heaviest penances were performed. Henceforth I must stand alone in the world, without kindred, without friends, without help, save such as the god might give me in the search.

"I was rich. The greater part of my goods I gave

to the Temple, and yet retained a considerable sum, for I should need money to carry out my quest, and after I had accomplished it I should hand over what remained for the benefit of the poor. I should myself become a fakir. I want you to understand, sahib, that henceforth I had but one object in life, a supreme one to accomplish, in which nothing must stand in my way, and that what would be in others a crime was but a sacrifice on my part, most acceptable to the god. I journeyed down to the place where my comrade was, dressed as one of the lowest class, even as a sweeper, and he and I strove by all the means in our power to discover what this man had done with the jewels. Night after night we crawled into his tent. We searched his bed and his clothes. With sharp rods we tried every inch of the soil, believing that he had hidden the diamonds underground, but we failed.

“Then my comrade said, ‘I must give my life to find out where he hides these things. I will watch night after night by the door of his tent, and if he comes out I will stab him. It shall be a mortal wound, but I will not kill him outright. Before he dies he will doubtless, as the other did, pass the jewels on to some comrade, and then it will be for you to follow him up.’ ‘It is good,’ I said. ‘This man may have hidden them away somewhere during the time they have marched through the country. In spite of the watch you have kept he may have said to himself, “I will return, though it be years hence.” Your plan is good. I envy you. ’Tis better to die thus than to live in sin as we are doing.’

"That evening the man was stabbed, but an officer running up killed my comrade. The soldier was taken to the hospital, and I lay down beside the tent with my eye to a slit that I had cut, and watched till morning.

"Then I took my broom and swept the ground. I had not been hired as one of the camp sweepers, and so could move about and sweep where I chose. No one ever asked me any questions. The soldiers heeded me no more than if I had been a dog, and, of course, supposed that I was acting by the order of the head of the sweepers. Presently I saw one of the servants of the hospital go across to the tent of the officer who had killed my comrade. He came over and went into the hospital tent. I felt sure that it was the wounded man that had sent for him. He was in there some time. Presently a soldier came out and went to the tent of the wounded man, and returned, bringing a musket. Then I said to myself, 'The god has blinded us. He wills that we shall go through many more toils before we regain the bracelet.' Doubtless the man had carried the bracelet in his musket all the time, and we, blind that we were, never thought of it.

"Presently the officer came out again. I noticed that as he did so he looked round on all sides, as if to see if he were watched; then I knew that it was as I had thought: the soldier had given the bracelet to him. At this I was well pleased; it would be far more easy to search the tent of an officer than of a soldier, who sleeps surrounded by his comrades. I thought that there was no hurry now; it would need but patience, and I should be sure to find it. I had not calculated

that he would have better opportunities than the soldier for going about, and that doubtless the soldier had warned him of his danger. Two hours later the officer mounted his horse and rode towards the camp of another regiment a mile and a quarter away. There was nothing in that, but I watched for his return all that day and all that night, and when he did not come back, I felt that he was doing something to get rid of the diamonds.

“He was away three days, and when he returned I was almost sure that he had not the diamonds about him. As he had ridden off he had looked about just as he had when he left the hospital : he was uneasy, just as if he were watched ; now he was uneasy no longer. Then I knew that my search would be a long one and might fail altogether. I went away, and for three months I prayed and fasted ; then I returned. I bought different clothes, I painted my forehead with another caste mark, then I bought from the servant of an officer in another regiment his papers of service,—recommendations from former masters. Then I went to the officer,—you will guess, sahib, that it was the major, your uncle,—and I paid his servant to leave his service and to present me as a brother of his who had been accustomed to serve white sahibs, and was, like himself, a good servant ; so I took his place.

“He was a good master, and I came to love him, though I knew that I might yet have to kill him. You have heard that I saved his life three times ; I did so partly because I loved him, but chiefly because his life was most precious to me, for if he had died I should have lost all clue to the jewels. I had, of course,

made sure that he had not got them with him, over and over again I searched every article in his possession. I ripped open his saddle lest they might be sewn up in its stuffing. All that could be done I did, but I was sure that he had not got them. He, on his part, came to like me. He thought that I was the most faithful of servants, and after the last time I saved his life he took me with him everywhere. He went down to Madras and was married there. I watched his every movement. After that he went down frequently. Then a child was born, and six months afterwards his wife died.

“The regiment was stationed at the fort. At that time he was at many places,—the governor’s, the other officer sahibs’, the merchants’, and others. I could not follow him, but I was sure by his manner that he had not taken back the bracelet from whoever he had sent it to. I knew him so well by this time that I should have noticed any change in his manner in a moment. At last the child went away in the charge of Mrs. Cunningham. I bribed the child’s ayah, and she searched Mrs. Cunningham’s boxes and every garment she had, and found no small sealed parcel or box amongst them. Three years more passed. By this time the colonel treated me more as a friend than as a servant. He said one day, laughing, ‘It is a long time since my things have been turned topsy-turvy, Ramoo. I think the thieves have come to the conclusion that I have not got what they are looking for.’ ‘What is that, sahib?’ I asked. ‘Some special jewels,’ he said. ‘They are extremely valuable. But I have got them

and a lot of other things so safely stowed that no one will ever find them unless I give them the clue.' 'But suppose you are killed, sahib,' I said; 'your little daughter will never get the things.' 'I have provided for that,' he answered. 'If I am killed I have arranged that she shall know all about it either when she comes to the age of eighteen or twenty-one.'

"A few weeks after that he was wounded very badly. I nursed him night and day for weeks, and when he came to England he brought me with him. As you know, sahib, he died. When he was in London he went to see Mrs. Cunningham and the child, and several times to the office of the lawyer who attended your father's funeral. Then he came down to your father, and I know he had long and earnest conversations with him. I did all I could to listen, but the colonel always had the windows and doors shut before he began to speak. I could see that your father was troubled. Then the colonel died. After his death I could never find his snuff-box; he had carried it about with him for some years; once or twice I had examined it, but it was too small for the diamonds to be hidden in. I supposed that he had given it to the sahib, your father, but as I could never find it I guessed that there was some mystery attached to it, though what, I could not tell.

"Then your father took me down to Crowswood with him, and Mrs. Cunningham and the little girl came down. I was surprised to find that your father seemed to be master of the estate, and that no one thought anything of the child, whose name had been changed. I spoke one day to Mrs. Cunningham about it. Your

father seemed to me a just and good man, and I could not believe that he was robbing his brother's daughter. Mrs. Cunningham told me that the colonel did not wish her to be known as an heiress, and that he had left the estate to his brother until she came of age. Your father was as good a master as the colonel had been. I watched and watched, and once or twice I overheard him talking to himself in the library, and discovered that your father himself was altogether ignorant of the hiding-place of the property that the colonel had mentioned in his will. I knew then that I should have to wait until the child was either eighteen or twenty-one.

"It was a long time, but I had learnt to be patient. I was not unhappy. I loved your father. I loved the colonel's little daughter, and I was very fond of you. All these things were small to me in comparison to my vow and the finding of the jewels of the god, but they shortened the years of waiting. Then a year before the young mistress was eighteen came the shot through the window. I did not know who had fired it, but I saw that your father's life was in danger, and I said to myself, 'He will tell the young sahib what he knows about the bracelet.' After you had gone into the library I opened the door quietly, and listened. I could hear much that was said, but not all. I heard him say something about a snuff-box, and some means of finding the lost things being hidden in it, and that he had kept them all these years in a secret hiding-place, which he described. You were to search for them, and I guessed from that that he did not know what he was to be told

when the young mem sahib came of age, or perhaps when she was eighteen. It was not until I had thought over what I heard that I came to the conclusion that if I could find the things he spoke of I might be able to find the jewels. By that time your father had gone to bed. I was foolish not to have been patient, but my blood boiled after waiting for eighteen or nineteen years. The god seemed to have sent me the chance, and it seemed to me that I should take it at once. I knew that he generally slept with his window open, and it seemed to me that it would be easy to slip in there and to get those things from the cabinet. I knew where the ladder was kept. I took a file from the tool-chest and cut the chain."

Here Mark dropped the letter in horror.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "Then Bastow spoke truly, and he was not my father's murderer. Never did a single suspicion of Ramoo enter my head. This is appalling ; but I cannot read any more now. It is time for me to go and dress for dinner."

"Is anything the matter with you, Mark?" Millicent asked, anxiously, as she met him in the drawing-room. "You look as white as a sheet."

"I have been reading Ramoo's letter, and he has told me some things that have surprised and shocked me. I will tell you about them after dinner, dear. It is a long story, but you won't have to wait until Dick and the Gregs are gone. They are interested in all that interests us, and shall hear the letter read. No ; I think I will ask them and Dick to come in in the morning. I should

not like anything to sadden the first evening of our coming home."

"Then it is something sad."

"Yes ; but it does not affect us, though it does affect Ramoo. Now, clear your brow, dear, and dismiss the subject from your mind, else our guests will fancy that our marriage has not been altogether so satisfactory as they had hoped."

"As if they could think such a thing as that, Mark!" she said, indignantly. "But there is the sound of wheels ; it is Mr. Chetwynd's gig."

The three visitors all came in together, having met at the door. Mark, with a great effort, put aside the letter from his mind, and a cheerful evening was spent. They had much to tell of their travels, many questions to ask about the parish and the neighbourhood generally, and of Dick Chetwynd as to mutual friends ; and when they rose to go, Mark said,—

"Would you mind riding over again to-morrow morning, Dick? I have a letter to read to you that will interest you greatly."

"Certainly ; what time shall I be here?"

"Say at eleven o'clock. It is a long epistle, and will take us an hour to get through ; after that we can stroll round, and, of course, you will stop to lunch. I should be glad if you and Mrs. Greg can come over, too," he added, turning to the rector. "You will be much interested also in the matter."

The next day the party met in the library at the hour named.

"I may tell you, Mr. Greg, that I specially asked you

and your wife here because this letter throws some light on Arthur Bastow's connection with my father's murder. You were friends with his father, and I think you ought to know. As to you, Dick, the letter will interest you from beginning to end, and will surprise as much as it will interest you."

"Even I don't know what it is, Mrs. Greg," Millicent said. "I know it quite upset Mark yesterday ; but he said he would sooner I did not know anything about it until to-day, as he did not want me to be saddened on the first evening of our return home. Now, please go on, Mark ; you have said quite enough to excite us all."

Mark had read but a short distance when Dick Chetwynd exclaimed,—

"Then Ramoo was at the bottom of that Indian business, after all. I almost wonder you never suspected it, Mark."

"Well, I hardly could do so," Mark said, "when my uncle was so fond of him, and he had served him so faithfully."

As he approached the point at which he had laid down the letter on the previous evening, Millicent's colour faded. Suddenly an exclamation of horror broke from her when he read the last line.

"Oh, Mark," she said, with quivering lips, "don't say it was Ramoo ! He always seemed so kind and good."

"It was here I stopped last night," he said ; "but I fear there can be no doubt about it. I must say that it is evident from this letter that no thought of doing my father harm was in his mind when he placed that ladder against the window. Now I will go on."

The letter continued as follows :

“Having placed the ladder, I clambered to the window and quietly entered the room. It was quite dark, but I knew the place of every piece of furniture so well that I was able to go without hesitation to the cabinet. Your father was speaking very slowly and distinctly when he told you how it was to be opened, and I was able to do it easily, but I did not know that the back opened with a sharp click, and the noise startled me and woke your father. In an instant he was out of bed and seized me by the throat. Now, he was a much stronger man than I was. I struggled in vain. I felt that in a moment I should become insensible. My vow and my duty to the god flashed across me, and, scarce knowing what I did, I drew a little dagger I always carried and struck blindly. He fell, and I fell beside him. For a time I was insensible. When I recovered I was seized with the bitterest remorse that I had killed one I loved, but I seemed to hear the voice of the god saying, ‘You have done well, Ramoo. I am your great master, and you are bound to my service.’

“I got up almost blindly, felt in the cabinet, and found a coin and a piece of paper, and a feeling of exultation came over me that after nearly twenty years I should succeed in carrying out my vow and taking his bracelet back to the god. I descended the ladder, crept in at the back door by which I had come out, went up to my room, where I had kept a light burning, and examined my treasures. Then I saw that all had been in vain. They were doubtless a key to the mystery, but

until a clue was given they were absolutely useless. I sat for hours staring at them. I would have gone back and replaced them in the cabinet and left all as it had been before, but I dared not enter the room again. The next day I heard you say that you suspected that the talk with your father had been overheard, and that the man who had earlier in the evening before shot at him had returned, and while listening had heard something said about the hiding-place, and thought that he would find some sort of treasure there. I thought that in the talk your father might have told you how to use these things, though I had not caught it, and it was therefore important that you should have them back again, so I went into the room after the inquest was over and placed the things in their hiding-place again.

“Then, thinking it over, I determined to leave your service. You would be trying to find the treasure, and I must watch you, and this I could not do as long as I was a house servant ; so I came up to London and you thought I had sailed for India, but I did not go. I hired four Lascars, men of my own religion, and paid them to watch every movement that you made, to see where you visited and where you went. I paid them well, and they served me well ; it was so that I was able to bring those men to your help when but for that you would have lost your life. It was for this to some extent that I had you followed, for I soon found out that you were on the search for the man who had fired through the window, and who you believed had killed your father, rather than for the jewels. I knew that you might run into danger, and partly because I loved you, and partly

because it was possible that it would be essential for that coin and piece of paper to be produced in order that the treasure might be obtained, I kept guard over you.

“When the 18th of August approached, we were all on the watch. I felt sure that you would take every possible precaution while you had the bracelet in your possession. We knew who were your principal friends,—the banker’s son and Mr. Chetwynd. On the 18th of August everything went on as usual. On the following day the banker’s son came to you, and as soon as he left you, you went to the lawyer’s, and afterwards to the banker’s. I felt sure now that it was at that bank that the jewels had been placed, and that you had been waiting till the young mem sahib’s birthday for the news that they might be taken out; then you went to Mr. Chetwynd’s, and he went to the bank. I had no doubt that he was to take them out for you, and after that one of the men never took his eyes off him when he was outside of his house. Afterwards you went to the place where the men used to fight, and the man who was watching you went in and had beer and saw you talking with the big man you used to fight with, in the parlour behind the bar. The watcher went out to follow you, but left another to watch this man. We found that both Mr. Chetwynd and he went to a shipping office in Tower Street, and we then guessed that you intended to take the bracelet at once across the sea.

“I went myself and found out that a vessel was sailing in two days to Amsterdam. I took a passage for a man in the cheap cabin, and asked to look at the list of passengers, as I believed that some friend would be sail-

ing by her ; there were two names down together in one handwriting among the first-class passengers, and I guessed that these were you and Mr. Chetwynd. I also saw the name of the big man, which I had heard long before, down in the list of the passengers, and another name next to his in the same handwriting. I did not know his name, but guessed that it was another of the fighting men, and that they were going to look after you until you had got rid of the diamonds. On the morning that she was to sail, one of the Lascars was on board ; I thought it possible that in order to throw anyone who might be following you off your scent you might at the last moment go ashore, and that Mr. Chetwynd might take the diamonds over, so I watched and saw you on the deck with your friend.

“I and the other three Lascars then took passage that evening in a craft for Rotterdam, and got to Amsterdam two days before your ship arrived ; we went to different houses, and, going separately into the worst parts of the town, soon found a man who kept a gambling-den, and who was a man who could be trusted. I offered him a thousand francs to collect twenty-five men, who were to be paid a hundred francs each, and to be ready, if your ship arrived after dark to attack two passengers that I would point out to them. I did not want you to be hurt, so bargained that all knives were to be left behind, and that he was to supply the men only with clubs. If the ship came in in daylight you were to be attacked the first time you went out after dark. You know how that was carried out. You

had two more men with you than I had expected ; but I thought that with a sudden rush you might all be separated. You know the rest. The moment you were knocked down I and three others carried you to a boat. It had been lying near the stairs, and we took you off to the barge in which I had arranged you should be taken to Rotterdam.

“We told them that you were a drunken man who had been stunned in a fight in a public-house. As soon as we were off, I searched you and found the diamonds. Then, as you know, we put you ashore. We all crossed to England that night. Two days later I sailed in this ship, the ‘Bramahpootra.’ I am not afraid of telling you this, because I know that the diamonds will not shine on the god’s arm until all fear of search and enquiry are over. My task will be done when I hand them over to the man who holds the office I once held ; then I shall bear the penances imposed on me for having broken my caste in every way, and for having taken life, and for the rest of my days I shall wander as a fakir through India. I shall be supported by the knowledge that I have done my duty to my god, and have sacrificed all in his service, but it will ever be a grief to me that in so doing it was necessary to sacrifice the life of one who had ever shown me kindness. You may wonder why I have written this, but I felt that I must own the truth to you, and that you should know that if in the course of my duty to the god it was my misfortune to slay your father, I have twice saved your life, just as three times I saved that of the colonel sahib, your uncle.”

There was silence for some little time after Mark had finished reading.

"It is a strange story, indeed," Mr. Greg said, "but it is not for us to judge the man. He has acted according to his lights, and none can do more. He sacrificed himself and his life solely to the service of his god, well knowing that, even were he successful, his reward would be penance and suffering, and a life of what cannot but be misery to a man brought up, as he has been, to consider himself of the highest and holiest rank of the people. I think, Mark, we need neither say nor think anything harshly of him."

"Certainly not," Mark agreed. "I can understand that according to his view of the matter anything that stood between him and his goal was but an obstacle to be swept aside; assuredly there was no premeditation in the killing of my father. I have no doubt that the man was attached to him, and that he killed him not to save his own life, but in order that his mission might be carried out."

"Quite so, Mark; it was done in the same spirit, if I may say so, that Abraham would have sacrificed his son at the order of his God. What years of devotion that man has passed through. Accustomed, as you see, to a lofty position, to the respect and veneration of those around him, he became a servant and performed duties that were in his opinion not only humiliating, but polluting and destructive to his caste, and which rendered him an outcast even among the lowest of his people. Do you not think so, Mrs. Thorndyke?"

Millicent, who was crying quietly, looked up.

"I can only think of him as the man who twice saved Mark's life," she said.

"I understand why you have wished to tell me this story," the rector went on to Mark. "You wish me to know that Arthur Bastow did not add this to his other crimes; that he was spared from being the murderer of your father, but from no want of will on his part; and, as we know, he killed many others, the last but an hour or two before he put an end to his own life, still I am glad that this terrible crime is not his. It seemed to be so revolting and unnatural. It was the Squire's father who had given the living to his father, and the Squire himself had been his friend in the greatest of his trials, and had given him a shelter and a home in his old age. I am glad at least that the man, evil as he was, was spared this last crime of the grossest ingratitude."

"Well, Mark," Dick Chetwynd said, cheerfully, in order to turn the subject, "I am heartily glad that we have got to the bottom of this jewel mystery. I have been puzzling over it all the time that you have been away, and I have never been able to understand how, in spite of the precautions that we took, they should have found out that the jewels were at Cotter's, and that you had them on board with you, and, above all, why they spared your life when they could so easily and safely have put you out of the way. It is certainly strange that while you were thinking over everything connected with the jewels, the idea that Ramoo was the leading spirit in the whole business should never once have occurred to you."

A month later, when Mark went up to town, he called at Leadenhall Street.

"Of course, you have not heard of the arrival of the 'Brahmapootra' at Madras yet. May I ask when she left the Cape?"

"She never left the Cape, sir," the clerk replied, "and there are very grave fears for her safety. She spoke the 'Surinam,' and gave her mails for England, when the latter was eight days out from the Cape, and the 'Surinam' reported that a day later she encountered a terrible gale, lost several spars, and narrowly escaped being blown on to the African coast. Since then we have had no news of the 'Brahmapootra.' A number of India-men have arrived since; the latest came in only yesterday, and up to the time when she left no news had been received of the ship. Three small craft had been sent up the coast weeks before to make enquiries for her, but had returned without being able to obtain any intelligence, and had seen no wreckage on the coast, although they had gone several hundred miles beyond where she had spoken the 'Surinam,' therefore, there can be but little doubt that she foundered with all hands during the gale. You had no near relatives on board, I hope, sir?"

"No near relatives, but there was one on board in whom I was greatly interested. Here is my card; I should feel greatly obliged if you would write me a line should you hear anything of her."

"I will do so, sir. We have had innumerable enquiries from friends and relatives of those on board, and although of late we have been obliged to say that there can no longer be any hope that she will ever be heard

of, not a day passes but many persons still come in to enquire."

No letter ever came to Mark, no news was ever heard of the "Brahmapootra." Ramoo's sacrifice was in vain, and never again did the diamond bracelet glisten on the arm of the idol in the unknown temple.

THE END.

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